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## Minimum dogma and religious toleration

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MINIMUM DOGMA  
AND  
RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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By  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines issues that emerge from the investigation of the relationship between John Locke's arguments for religious toleration as found in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* and his construction of a minimum dogma for Christianity in his *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. The first chapter follows the development of minimum dogma from its origin in the experience Eric Voegelin terms the leap in being, through Xenophanes' concept of "seemliness," to the minimum dogmas of Plato. The second chapter examines the use of minimum dogma in theories of religious toleration by More and Spinoza. The final chapter examines the work of John Locke and questions the adequacy of his formulation minimum dogma without a basis in the leap in being as a support for religious toleration.

## INTRODUCTION

David Wootton in his introduction to *Political Writings of John Locke*

writes:

A few years ago it was a remarkable fact that there was hardly a country in the world that did not claim to be a democracy or to be on the road to democracy.... The exceptions (e.g. Kuwait, South Africa) were obvious abnormalities. At the same time, though, the differences between the so-called people's democracies and their opponents, the bourgeois democracies, were so great that nobody could imagine there was one common set of political principles recognized throughout the world. It was merely that one word passed as common currency in several different languages. Now the situation is totally different. As communism in eastern [*sic*] Europe has collapsed, it has suddenly begun to look as though liberal democracy, founded on the separation of powers, representative government, freedom of speech and conscience, and the right to pursue wealth, will become the norm throughout the world. Even in England calls for constitutional reform are increasingly heard, and it is now possible to appeal against the decrees of a semi-sovereign Parliament to a court of rights in Strasburg. We are all, it would seem, liberals now. Almost all of us can now say that Locke is *our* political philosopher.<sup>1</sup>

Accepting that this is true, the research of the political theory of John Locke represents a very timely study. It, in fact, would constitute the exegesis of the theoretical underpinnings of the political world as it currently stands. The current study is an attempt to advance this research.

Following Eric Voegelin's approach of political science first explained in *The New Science of Politics* and carried to fruition in *Order and History*, such research is believed to properly begin with an inquiry into the representation of existential meaning at the heart of John Locke's political thought. The centrality of religious toleration to Locke's thought and the centrality of Locke's minimum dogmas to this toleration indicate

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<sup>1</sup> *Political Writings of John Locke*, ed. with an introduction by David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), 8-9.

that an inquiry into these minimum dogmas represents a credible start to this research. Following Voegelin's dictum that "the order of history emerges from the history of order,"<sup>2</sup> this study will first examine the history of minimum dogmas before turning its attention to the work of Locke.

Voegelin's treatment of minimum dogma is closely related to his treatment of the origination of theology. This study will therefore turn to Voegelin's analysis of the experience from which theology originated in search of a theoretical understanding of minimum dogma useful to the research of that in Locke's thought. Voegelin terms this experience the "leap in being." Voegelin finds that Xenophanes differentiates this experience with his symbol "seemliness" in the direction that will eventually be developed by Plato into theology.<sup>3</sup> The first chapter of this follows Voegelin's *Order and History* treatment of the leap in being and Xenophanes to an analysis of Plato's theology and minimum dogmas.

These dogmas developed by Plato are substantially different from those of Locke. This necessitates a second chapter dedicated to two minimum dogmas found to be intermediate between those of Plato and those of Locke. These are the minimum dogmas found in St. Thomas More's *Utopia* and in the work of Benedict de Spinoza. These minimum dogmas are found to be intermediate in the sense that they connect minimum dogma with the toleration of religion, in contrast to Plato's use of minimum dogma as a means to critique the improper representations of divinity he found in his surrounding society, while maintaining the end of representing the divine properly in society, in

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1, *Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1956), ix.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

contrast to Locke, who this study will argue lacks such an end. As Voegelin does not address these dogmas in any substantial way in *Order and History*, an attempt is made to develop Voegelin's *History of Political Ideas* treatments into a form more consistent with Voegelin's later work while also addressing some disagreements with Voegelin's handling of these thinkers.

Locke's minimum dogmas will finally receive direct treatment in the third and final chapter. This chapter examines and critiques both the minimum civil dogma found in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* and the minimum religious dogma found in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. This chapter and this study conclude with an examination of the interaction of these two minimum dogmas.

**CHAPTER ONE  
MINIMUM DOGMA:  
XENOPHANES AND PLATO**

**I. Introduction - The Leap in Being**

Eric Voegelin identifies the origin not only of minimum dogma, the subject of this study, but also theology and even sectarian conflict with an experience he terms a “leap in being.” The centrality of this experience for these key issues in the work of John Locke necessitates that an adequate understanding of this experience be achieved before the examination of Locke’s political theory. This chapter will therefore follow Voegelin’s treatment of the “leap in being” and its accompanying theoretical problems as they develop towards the range of problems found in the works of John Locke.

Voegelin gives his initial discussion of the “leap in being” in the introduction to the first volume of his masterwork *Order and History*. To properly understand this “leap in being” described by Voegelin, attention must first be given to what it is a “leap” from. Voegelin begins his treatment of the situation prior to this experience:

Man’s partnership in being is the essence of his existence, and this essence depends on the whole, of which existence is a part. Knowledge of the whole, however, is precluded by the identity of the knower with the partner, and the ignorance of the whole precludes essential knowledge of the part. This situation of ignorance with regard to the decisive core of existence is more than disconcerting: it is profoundly disturbing, for from the depth of this ultimate ignorance wells up the anxiety of existence.

The ultimate, essential ignorance is not complete ignorance. Man can achieve considerable knowledge about the order of being, and not the least part of that knowledge is the distinction between the knowable and the unknowable. Such achievement, however, comes late in the long-drawn-out process of experience and symbolization that forms the subject matter of the present study. The concern of man about the meaning of his existence in the field of being does not remain pent up in the tortures of anxiety, but can vent itself in the creation of



symbols purporting to render intelligible the relations and tensions between the distinguishable terms of the field.<sup>4</sup>

Voegelin finds that “even in the confusion of [the] early stages [of symbolization] there is enough method to allow the distinction of typical features in the process of symbolization.” Initial “typical features” include “the predominance of the experience of participation” and “the preoccupation of the lasting and passing (i.e., the durability and transiency) of the partners in the community of being.”<sup>5</sup> It is the third typical feature identified by Voegelin that proves most important for the subject of this study, however. This feature “is the attempt at making the essentially unknowable order of being intelligible as far as possible through the creation of symbols which interpret the unknown by analogy with the really, or supposedly, known.” Such symbols, “responding to the pressure of experience,” become increasingly adequate.<sup>6</sup>

Voegelin explains the further development of symbols:

Compact blocks of the knowable will be differentiated into their component parts and the knowable itself will gradually come to be distinguished from the essentially unknowable. Thus, the history of symbolization is a progression from compact to differentiated experiences and symbols. Since this process is the subject matter of the whole subsequent study we shall at present mention only two basic forms of symbolization which characterize great periods of history. The one is the symbolization of society and its order as an analogue of the cosmos and its order; the other is the symbolization of social order by analogy with the order of a human existence that is well attuned to being. Under the first form society will be symbolized as a microcosmos; under the second form as a macroanthropos.<sup>7</sup>

Society ordered by the microcosmos symbol is chronologically prior to the second form mentioned. Voegelin remarks on this precedence, “Why this should be hardly requires elaborate explanations, for earth and heaven are so impressively the embracing order into

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<sup>4</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, 1: 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. Voegelin’s discussion of cosmological and anthropological representation in Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: Chicago, 1952), chap. 3.

which human existence must fit itself, if it wants too survive, that the overwhelmingly powerful and visible partner in the community of being suggests its order as the model of all order, including that of man and society.”<sup>8</sup> Voegelin finds that the civilizations of the ancient Near East, in particular, “symbolized politically organized society as a cosmic analogue, as a cosmion, by letting vegetative rhythms and celestial revolutions function as models for the structural and procedural order of society.”<sup>9</sup>

When these cosmologically symbolized societies break down, in the succession of the empires of the ancient Near East for example, Voegelin finds that the “disaster” of such breakdown tends to “engulf the trust in cosmic order” and leads to a new symbolization of “society as macroanthropos.” The breakdown of societies “in spite of [their] ritual integration into cosmic order” leads to a shift in symbolization “toward what is more lasting than the visibly existing world ... toward the invisibly existing being beyond all being in tangible existence.” Voegelin finds that since this being transcends “all being in the world and of the world itself,” it “can be experienced only as a movement in the soul of man.” This means “the soul ... ordered by attunement to the unseen god [transcendent being] becomes the model of order that will furnish symbols for ordering society analogically in its image.”<sup>10</sup>

According to Voegelin, this shift in symbols from the cosmos made small, as in the civilizations examined in Part I of *Israel and Revelation*,<sup>11</sup> to that of man written

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 5-6; for Voegelin’s analysis of these civilizations see Part I, “The Cosmological Order of the Ancient Near East,” in this volume; for Voegelin’s earlier work on cosmions see Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, chap. 1§2 and chap. 2§2.

<sup>10</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, 1: 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13ff.

large, as found in Book II of Plato's *Republic*,<sup>12</sup> may be empirically observed in a number of different societies and be manifested in a number of ways:

The shift toward macroanthropic symbolization becomes manifest in the differentiation of philosophy and religion out of the preceding, more compact forms of symbolization, and it can be empirically observed, indeed, as an occurrence in the phase of history which Toynbee has classified as the Time of Troubles. In Egypt the social breakdown between the Old and Middle Kingdom witnessed the rise of the Osiris religiousness. In the feudal disintegration of China appeared the philosophical schools, especially those of Lao-tse and Confucius. The war period before the foundation of the Maurya Empire was marked by the appearance of the Buddha and of Jainism. When the world of the Hellenic polis disintegrated, the philosophers appeared, and the further troubles of the Hellenistic world were marked by the rise of Christianity. It would be unwise, however, to generalize this typical occurrence into a historical 'law,' for there are complications in detail. The absence of such a shift in the breakdown of Babylonian society (as far as the scantiness of sources allows the negative judgment) suggests that the 'law' would have 'exceptions,' while Israel seems to have arrived at the second form without any noticeable connection with a specific institutional breakdown and subsequent period of trouble.<sup>13</sup>

Voegelin finds that at this point in the process of symbolization, awareness of the analogical character of the symbols typically persists intact. Voegelin describes the variety with which this awareness may impact the symbolization:

The order of being, while remaining in the area of essential ignorance, can be symbolized analogically by using more than one experience of partial order in existence. The rhythms of plant and animal life, the sequence of the seasons, the revolutions of sun, moon, and constellations may serve as models for the analogical symbolizations of social order. The order of society may serve as a model for symbolizing celestial order. All these orders may serve as models for symbolizing the order in the realm of divine forces. And the symbolizations of divine order in their turn may be used for analogical interpretations of existential orders within the world.<sup>14</sup>

“Concurrent and conflicting symbols” occur in this milieu but fail to “engender distrust in the truth of the symbols.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 368c-e.

<sup>13</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, 1: 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

The significance of this milieu of symbols prior to the “leap in being” for theorization of toleration becomes apparent in the following passage:

If anything is characteristic of the early history of symbolization, it is the pluralism in expressing truth, the generous recognition and tolerance extended to rival symbolizations of the same truth. The self-interpretation of an early empire as the one and only true representative of cosmic order on earth is not in the least shaken by the existence of neighboring empires who indulge in the same type of interpretation. The representation of a supreme divinity under a special form and name in one Mesopotamian city-state is not shaken by a different representation in the neighboring city-state. And the merger of various representations when an empire unifies several formerly independent city-states, the change from one representation to another when the dynasties change, the transfer of cosmogonic myths from one god to another, and so forth, show that the variety of symbolizations is accompanied by a vivid consciousness of the sameness of truth at which man aims by means of his various symbols.<sup>16</sup>

Religious toleration is simply not an issue under such conditions. Therefore, toleration cannot emerge as a theoretical issue until a break with these conditions is made. This break occurs in what Voegelin will term a “leap in being.”

Voegelin finds that the break with the previous milieu of symbols begins “when the awareness of the analogical character of the symbolization is attracted by the problem of the greater or lesser adequacy of symbols to their purpose of making the order of being transparent.” The very mass of symbols leads to an experience of their inadequacy for “the symbols are many, while being is one.” Attempts ranging from “interpreting a manifold of highest local divinities as aspects of the one highest empire god” to “theogonic speculation” upon the origin of the other gods “through creation by the one truly highest god” may be made to bring the a mass of symbols “into a rational, hierarchical order.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 8.

Though the “limit of tolerance for rival symbolizations” is reached in “political summodeism and theogonic speculation,” Voegelin maintains that “no serious break need yet occur.” Voegelin explains, “The theogonic speculation of a Hesiod was not the beginning of a new religious movement in opposition to the polytheistic culture of Hellas, and the Roman summodeism, through Constantine, could even draw Christianity into its system of symbolization.” Voegelin finds that the break, when it does occur, “results not from rational reflection on the inadequacy of pluralistic symbolization (though such reflection may experientially be a first step toward more radical ventures), but from the profounder insight that no symbolization through analogues of existential order in the world can even faintly be adequate to the divine partner on whom the community of being and its order depend.”<sup>18</sup>

Voegelin goes on to describe how toleration for the milieu of symbols is broken:

Only when the gulf in the hierarchy of being that separates divine from mundane existence is sensed, only when the originating, ordering, and preserving source of being is experienced in its absolute transcendence beyond being in tangible existence, will all symbolization by analogy be understood in its essential inadequacy and even impropriety. The seemliness of symbols –if we may borrow the term from Xenophanes –then will become a pressing concern, and a hitherto tolerable freedom of symbolization will become intolerable because it is an unseemly indulgence betraying a confusion about the order of being and, more deeply, a betrayal of being itself through lack of proper attunement. The horror of a fall from being into nothingness motivates an intolerance which no longer is willing to distinguish between stronger and weaker gods, but opposes the true god to the false gods. This horror induced Plato to create the term theology, to distinguish between true and false types of theology, and to make the true order of society dependent on the rule of men whose proper attunement to divine being manifests itself in their true theology.<sup>19</sup>

Voegelin dismisses charges that this acute awareness to the inadequacy or impropriety of analogical symbolization is merely an emphasis “on something that was

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.

known all the time and did not receive more attention precisely because nothing would be changed by becoming more emphatic about it.”<sup>20</sup> Voegelin finds that “existence is partnership in the community of being; and the discovery of imperfect participation, of a mismanagement of existence through lack of proper attunement to the order of being, of the danger of a fall from being, is a horror indeed, compelling a radical reorientation of existence.” Such a “horror” impels a turn both from symbols now deemed “unseemly” and “from world and society as the sources of misleading analogy.”<sup>21</sup> This turn involves not only a turn from mundane existence but also as a turn “toward the true source of order.” Voegelin finds that this shift in ordering forces “is not an increase on the same scale but a qualitative leap.” This “leap in being,” when it occurs to a society, causes the converted community to “experience itself as qualitatively different from all other societies that have not taken the leap.”<sup>22</sup> This experience of qualitative difference may be found in Israel’s designation as God’s chosen people, the distinction between Christian and Pagan, and perhaps even the distinction between Greek and Barbarian.

That the experience of this “leap in being” will have significant implications for theorization on religious toleration now becomes readily apparent. This chapter may now turn its attention to where the development of these implications shed light upon the minimum dogmas found in the work of Locke. The remainder of this chapter will continue to analyze Voegelin’s treatment of these issues as they are found in his interpretation of Xenophanes’ insistence upon the “seemly” representation of the gods and in his interpretation of Plato’s development of theology.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10, cf. Plato’s parable of the cave in Plato, *The Republic*, Bk. 7 for an illustration of this turn.

<sup>22</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, 1: 10.

## II. Xenophanes' Seemliness

Voegelin finds a precursor to Plato's differentiation of theology, which in turn is a precursor to the minimum dogmas of More, Spinoza, and Locke, in the surviving fragments of the work of the pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes.<sup>23</sup> Voegelin finds Xenophanes remarkable as "the first to dare" to attack the creators of the panhellenic body of myths, that is, an attack upon the poets. Voegelin then finds any assertion of a truth in opposition to myth or analogical symbolization in the arena of Hellenic civilization must necessarily do.<sup>24</sup> Xenophanes' attack was not directed against poetry as poetry,<sup>25</sup> but rather against the myth delivered by the poets, Homer and Hesiod for instance, "as an obstacle to the adequate understanding of the order of the soul." Poetic form as poetic form was so far from question that Xenophanes himself "accepted it as the adequate instrument for expressing his own truth."<sup>26</sup>

Voegelin offers a useful survey of the relevant fragments of Xenophanes' work:

We arrange the pertinent fragments in three groups:

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Jaeger, "It is a feeling of reverence that leads Xenophanes to deny all the finite shortcomings and limitations laid upon the gods by traditional religion, and makes him a unique theological figure, despite his dependence on the views of the natural philosophers. Only as a theologian, indeed, can he really be understood." Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, tran. Edward S. Robinson (London: Oxford, 1967), 49; with Burnet, "He [Xenophanes] was really Goethe's *Weltkind* [worldling], with prophets to right and left of him, and he would have smiled if he had known that one day he was to be regarded as a theologian." John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1930), 129. This contradiction is less troubling in Voegelin's treatment of Xenophanes' work as a forerunner of Plato's theology without asserting anachronistically that Xenophanes was a theologian. Cf. Gregory Vlastos, "Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 2, no. 7 (1952): 101 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 2, *The World of the Polis* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1957), 171.

<sup>25</sup> Voegelin remarks that this "bourgeois abstraction did not exist in Hellas." *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

(1) The attack itself was directed against the improper presentation of the gods. “Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods all things that are a shame and disgrace among men, such as stealing, adultery and cheating each other” (B 11). The reason for such misrepresentation Xenophanes apparently sought and found in the naiveté of the early poets. “Mortals suppose that gods are born, and have clothes, voices and bodily forms like theirs” (B 14). Men create gods in their image, down to racial differences: “Ethiopians make their gods flat-nosed and black, the Thracians let theirs have blue eyes and red hair” (B 16). And if horses and oxen and lions could make works of art like men ‘they would form their gods horse-like and oxen-like, each after its own kind’ (B 15).

(2) To such fancies Xenophanes opposed his own conception of God: “One God is greatest among gods and men, not like mortals in body or thought [*noema*]” (B 23). The divine is a living being (*zoon*) though not of articulated form, for “all through it sees, all through it thinks, all through it hears” (B 24). Without any effort it sways all things through its thought (B 25). “It ever abides in the self-same place and never moves; nor is it seemly [*epiprepei*] for it to go now hither now thither” (B 26).

(3) Concerning source and certainty of his knowledge Xenophanes raised no specific claims: “The gods did not grant knowledge of all things to mortals from the beginning, but by seeking they find in time what is better” (B 18); and “there never was nor will be a man who knows about the gods and all the things I speak of. Even if by chance he should say the full truth, yet he would not know that he does so; there is fancy in all things” (B 34).

We know nothing about the larger context of these fragments; each of them must stand for itself. The arrangement in three groups does not reflect an intention of their author.<sup>27</sup>

Voegelin explains how these fragments are to be interpreted:

The key to the understanding of the fragments lies in the word *epiprepai* which [*sic*] means “it is seemly.” What Homer and Hesiod have to say about the gods is unseemly; what Xenophanes has to say in his turn presumably is seemly.<sup>28</sup>

Voegelin does not find any specific criteria for seemliness within the fragments of Xenophanes. As Fragments 18 and 34 (quoted by Voegelin in the third group above) indicate an historical evolution in the criteria of seemliness and as “there is an element of fancy (*dokos*) in assertions concerning gods and other things whereof Xenophanes speaks,” Voegelin finds that “Xenophanes himself might even be exposed to charges

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 172; Voegelin notes that all quotations “refer to Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (7<sup>th</sup> ed., Berlin, 1954).” Voegelin, *Order and History*, 2: 171n.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 172.



similar to the ones which he levels against Homer and Hesiod if the notions about seemliness should change.” Voegelin finds such charges levied against Xenophanes “in the next generation at the hands of Heraclitus.”<sup>29</sup>

After this discussion of evolutionary nature of the Xenophanes’ concept of seemliness, Voegelin begins his examination of “the seemly and unseemly features themselves.”<sup>30</sup> Voegelin identifies three areas in which Xenophanes’ identifies representations of divinity unseemly. The first, discussed above as a means of finding Xenophanes’ work itself as unseemly, is that of fanciful representation. Following this is Xenophanes’ finding the anthropomorphic representation of the gods by the poets to be unseemly.<sup>31</sup> The final area, closely related to the second in that Voegelin also finds it in

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 172-173.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.; Voegelin gives closer attention to what is meant by “anthropomorphism” than what is directly relevant to the current study. As Voegelin finds this discussion essential to a proper understanding of his own thought on the matter, I will provide the passage here.

“Xenophanes does not simply berate the poets because they attribute disgraceful actions to the gods, but also develops a theory concerning the fallacy involved in them. The gods, he opines, are endowed with improper attributes because man creates gods in his image. This is the fallacy which modern sociologists call ‘anthropomorphism.’ According to Comte the history of human thought moves from anthropomorphic theology, through metaphysics, to positive science. Xenophanes must be credited with the formulation of the theory that the myth is an anthropomorphic representation of divinity, to be superceded with the advance of insight by more appropriate symbols. Since the theory has had far-reaching consequences, we must briefly examine the nature of the problem.

The characterization of mythic symbolization as anthropomorphic is a theoretical mistake. In the first place, the theory would require certain elementary emendations in order to be debatable at all. Obviously, in the Greek myth the gods never were really represented as human beings. The gods were distinguished through their immortality; they were physiologically distinguished through their living on a special diet; and they were endowed with a variety of nonhuman qualities such as superior knowledge and strength, the ability to be invisible and to change their form; and so forth. To speak of anthropomorphic representation of gods without such qualifications is as inapposite as to find angels in a Renaissance painting represented ‘realistically,’ overlooking the minor

Xenophanes' critical example that Thracians and Ethiopians worshipping gods that appear to share their ethnic characteristics, is a demand that representations of the gods be adequately universal.<sup>32</sup>

Voegelin is careful to note that this demand for universality does not equate to monotheism. Voegelin explains:

It was the universality of the realissimum that made all idiosyncratic representations of particular gods appear "unseemly." Nevertheless, the gods who were unseemly represented were still the gods; the unseemliness concerned their representation, it did not concern their divinity. Xenophanes could well accept for himself the saying attributed to Thales: "The world is full of gods." The universality of transcendence discovered by him did not abolish the old gods; it only improved their understanding.<sup>33</sup>

Though Voegelin finds that Xenophanes is probably not a monotheist, he does find that Xenophanes develops "the symbol of the 'greatest god,'" found in the second grouping of fragments above.<sup>34</sup> Voegelin describes Xenophanes' experience originating this symbol:

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point that the representation of human-shaped creatures floating on clouds is in itself unrealistic. As soon, however, as such emendations are made, and the meaning of anthropomorphism is properly restricted to the representation of gods as beings who on occasion assume human shape, and talk and act like men, we become aware of the fundamental theoretical problem that such partial transfer of human qualities (which does not affect the essential divinity of the gods) may have something to do with the idea which man has of himself. Is it not probable, we may ask, that human qualities are transferred to gods only as long as the spheres of the divine and human are not quite clearly set off against each other? That 'anthropomorphism' is possible only as long as the idea of man is not too clearly differentiated? That 'anthropomorphism' occurs only when it cannot occur at all because an idea of man that could be transferred to the gods has not yet developed? And that it tends to disappear precisely when a transferable idea of man has been formed at last?" Ibid., 174-175.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.; Voegelin finds the terms "monotheism" and "polytheism" problematic because they misconceive "the symbolization of divinity as a matter of theoretical systems." Voegelin recalls "a dictum of Goethe" to oppose "this rationalistic attitude." This dictum reads, "As a moralist I am a monotheist; as an artist I am a polytheist; as a naturalist I am a pantheist." Ibid., 179.

His genius has a peculiar spiritual directness which can be sensed in the glance at the Heaven, followed by the assurance that the One is God. The most important part of this account is for us the formulation of the assurance. God is perhaps not one, but the One is the God. The experience is concerned with the One, and of this One divinity is predicated.<sup>35</sup>

Voegelin's exegesis of Xenophanes' fragments illustrates a first move toward the minimum dogma that appears later in the developed form of theology in the work of Plato. This theology and its minimum dogma will be shown in this and subsequent chapters to have a fundamentally different relation to religious toleration than the later manifestations of minimum dogma found in the work of More, Spinoza, and Locke. The following section of this chapter will examine Plato's theology, and Voegelin's treatment of it in *Order and History*, with the purpose of developing a theoretical understanding of minimum dogma useful in the analysis of these later manifestations.

### III. Plato's Theology

Minimum dogma in the works of Plato first appears in the second book of *The Republic* with Plato's first use of the word *theologia*. In the dialogue Socrates says:

Adeimantus, you and I aren't poets right now but founders of a city. It's appropriate for founders to know the models according to which the poets must tell their tales. If what the poets produce goes counter to these models, founders must not give way; however, they must not themselves make up tales.<sup>36</sup>

Adeimantus responds, "But, that is just it; what would the models for speech about the gods [*theologia*] be."<sup>37</sup> Dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantus over what "models for speech about the gods" should be produces two primary rules for censorship of the poets. Following from the finding that the god is good "and, hence, must be said to be so," the dialogue partners find the rule that the god "is not the cause of everything [or

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 378e-379a; all translations of *The Republic* are from Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 2d ed., tran. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 379a.

even many things]; rather it is the cause of the things that are in a good way, while it is not responsible for the bad things.”<sup>38</sup> The second rule arises when Socrates and Adeimantus agree that the gods do not alter themselves or lie, primarily because they do not need to.<sup>39</sup>

The minimum dogma encapsulated in this theology is not the only one found in the work of Plato. In Book X of *The Laws* the Athenian Stranger enumerates a set of minimum dogmas at the conclusion of the lengthy prelude [*prooemium*] to the proposed city’s laws on piety:<sup>40</sup>

Shall we not assert, then, that the three provisions –that the gods exist, exercise supervisory care, and are in every way not to be appeased in a manner contrary to what is just –have been sufficiently demonstrated?<sup>41</sup>

Impiety is to be punished by imprisonment in one of two prisons according to whether the one found guilty is of “a naturally just disposition.” If naturally just, they are to be imprisoned in the “Moderation-Tank,” a prison near the meeting place of the Nocturnal Council concerned with the city’s laws on impiety, “for no less than five years.” During this time, the prisoners will be cut off from all contact except the Nocturnal Council “who are to associate with them for the purposes of admonishment and the salvation of the soul.” If after this time “someone among them should seem to be moderate,” then they are to be freed. But if they have not been convinced to be pious or have not been made moderate enough to seem to be so, then a further conviction of impiety will merit a death

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 379b-c.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 383a.

<sup>40</sup> For an examination of Plato’s use of Prooemium in *The Laws* see Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 3, *Plato and Aristotle* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1957), 255-257.

<sup>41</sup> Plato, *The Laws*, 907b; all translations of *The Laws* are from Plato, *The Laws of Plato*, tran. Thomas L. Pangle (New York: Basic Books, 1980; reprint, Chicago: Chicago, 1988).

sentence. Those convicted without a “naturally just disposition” will be imprisoned “in the middle of the country, in some spot that is deserted and as wild as possible.” Only slaves may have contact with these prisoners. Further, when they die, they are to be denied a proper burial.<sup>42</sup>

Neither of the minimum dogmas in Plato’s work expands the range of tolerance for representations of divinity as do the minimum dogmas of More, Spinoza, and Locke. Both function instead as restrictions of this range, specifically as a restriction of the tolerance of what had become the dominant symbolization of the divine in Hellenic society. In the passage constructing the minimum dogma of *The Republic* each provision of the dogma is developed with examples of what must be censored in the poetry of Homer and the Tragedians that constituted this dominant symbolization.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, the dogma of *The Laws* by which the attempt to bribe the gods against justice with sacrifices is criminalized as impious attacks such attitudes prominent in his contemporary society.<sup>44</sup>

These two sets of minimum dogma are not to be understood as synonymous with one another, however. Voegelin’s treatment of each of the minimum dogmas is helpful in illustrating differences between the two that will aid in the understanding of later minimum dogmas. Voegelin’s discussion of Plato’s theology and minimum dogma found in *The Republic* appears in his treatment of the three pairs of concepts that Voegelin finds Plato utilizing in his resistance to his surrounding corrupt society. The first two “Platonic pairs of concepts” are constituted by the opposition of justice to *polypragmosyne* (“the readiness to engage in multifarious activities which are not a

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<sup>42</sup> Plato, *The Laws*, 908a-909d.

<sup>43</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 379d-383c.

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *The Laws*, 906b-907b; cf. Adeimantus’s speech in *The Republic*, 363c-365a.

man's proper business") and by the opposition of the *philosophos* (lover of wisdom) to the *philodoxos* (lover of opinion). The passages relevant to this study are found in Voegelin's explanation of the third pair, the opposition of *aletheia* (truth) to *pseudos* (falsehood).<sup>45</sup>

Voegelin finds that this "pair of concepts [which "refers to the true and false, or proper and improper, presentation of the gods"] moves in the tradition of Xenophanes."

Voegelin summarizes the history of this pair:

The pair of concepts has a long history. It was developed for the first time by Hesiod when he opposed his true history of the gods to current false stories. Xenophanes, then, sharpened the issue to the criteria of "seemliness" in the symbolization of the gods, and rejected anthropomorphic symbols. Moreover, the motivating experience became clear, that is, the discovery of universal humanity which can be recognized as such only in relation to a universal transcendental realissimum. The one, unseen, greatest god, who is the same for all men, is correlative with a sameness of men that is now found in the sameness of their transcendental experiences. Plato, finally, introduced the "types of theology" as the conceptual instrument for clarifying the issue.<sup>46</sup>

Voegelin goes on to explain the importance of "true theology":

True humanity requires true theology; the man with false theology is an untrue man. 'To be deceived or uninformed in the soul about true being [*peri ta onta*]' means that 'the lie itself' [*hos alethos pseudos*] has taken possession of 'the highest part of himself' and steeped it into 'ignorance of the soul' (382a-b).<sup>47</sup>

Voegelin finds that the content of this "true theology" in the minimum dogma discussed above. Voegelin's finding of "truth" in this theology will be shown to be the key difference with the minimum dogma found in *The Laws*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, 3: 63-67; though they are not directly pertinent to the discussion of minimum dogma, Voegelin's discussion of the first two pairs are interesting in their own right, especially as a critique of the interpretation of Plato as a philosopher aloof from the political activity.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 68; cf. Bloom, "The first segment of the study of poetry constitutes, therefore, a theology, a theology not true but salutary." Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 2d ed., tran.

The difference in the minimum dogmas in the two dialogues originates in the difference in the cities constructed in each. The philosopher-kings in *The Republic* served as a spiritual ordering force directly attuned to the divine. The emergence of philosopher-kings was deemed unlikely in the dialogue, making the emergence of the “best city” dependent upon the order offered by these “sons of God” also unlikely.<sup>49</sup> The city in *The Laws* is constructed to exist under more probable conditions. Rather than being ruled by philosophers as the city in *The Republic*, the city in *The Laws* is merely founded by one. The spiritual ordering force of philosophy is not embodied by its rulers, but is instead mediated by its laws (*nomoi*).<sup>50</sup>

Voegelin describes the consequences of this shift:

In the polis of the *nomoi*, however, men are not the sons of god; they are his puppets. On the lower existential level, which is presupposed for the citizenry, the divine measure cannot be the living order of the soul; God and man have drawn apart and the distance must now be bridged by the symbols of a dogma. From the vision of the Agathon man has fallen to the acceptance of a creed. Plato the savior has withdrawn; his polis cannot be penetrated by the presence of his divine reality; Plato the founder of a religion is faced by the problem of how the substance of his mystical communication with God can be translated into a dogma with obligatory force.<sup>51</sup>

Plato’s response, which Voegelin finds to be similar to that of Spinoza (to be discussed in the next chapter), is an “attempt to formulate a creed for the people” with “a minimum set of dogmas that would leave the utmost liberty to individuals who might wish to embellish the bare structure with details of their own, while it would be sufficient as a religious

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Allan Bloom, 352; Bloom’s treatment may not be that of Strauss, “At any rate, the conversation between Socrates and Adeimantus about theology shifts insensibly from the demand for noble lies about the gods to the demand for the truth about the gods.” Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Chicago, 1964), 98.

<sup>49</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 473c-d, 488a ff.

<sup>50</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, 3: 220-221.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

bond for the political community.”<sup>52</sup> The divergence with *The Republic*’s minimum dogma finally becomes clear in Voegelin’s finding that neither Plato nor Spinoza “needed the dogma” for themselves, but instead they “created it deliberately ... for the mass of men whose spiritual strength is weak and who can absorb the spirit only in the form of dogmatic symbols.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, while the dogma found in *The Republic* is true

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<sup>52</sup> This comparison may obscure the relation of the two thinkers’ respective positions on religious toleration. The analysis in the next chapter finds that the “creed for the people” of Spinoza is constructed to convince the ruling aristocracy to tolerate the beliefs of those they rule so long as those beliefs make their believers just and charitable. This toleration would allow a community that shares the mysticism of Spinoza to emerge beneath the aristocracy. This does not seem to be the case in *The Laws*. The minimum dogma there is instituted to move the whole of society as near to the divine as a whole society might move but does not move beyond what society as a whole is capable of. Plato and Spinoza would probably end up in the “Moderation-Tank” should they attempt to form any sort of community of mystics around themselves. Philosophers in this city are solitary figures who must be moderate enough to keep their mouths shut or willing to limit their dialogue to the Nocturnal Council. That is assuming that philosophy can emerge at all under these conditions. The limitation of the exercise of philosophy to the city in speech and to the democratic city in *The Republic* remains in *The Laws*. In this light, Spinoza’s minimum dogma may be considered an institution democratic (in the Platonic sense) in character while those of Plato cannot.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-264; This difference inverts the difference Voegelin found in the myths constructed in each dialogue in *Anamnesis*: “This question [“of the ‘adequacy’ of the respective myth”] is of special importance to Plato, since in a concrete case he has created two myths of which the later one is meant to be better. In the *Politeia* [*The Republic*], having introduced the three types of the wise, the courageous, and the desirous that form the three classes of the rulers, the warriors, and the producers, Plato inserts the mythical story that the three human types are due to the gods having put either gold, or silver, or iron into their various souls. This is the only myth of Plato that must be classified as pragmatic. Plato himself does not ‘believe’ it, but uses it as a fable in the polis to keep the lower classes quiet. In the *Nomoi* [*The Laws*], this pragmatic myth is superseded by the ‘true’ myth of the golden threads by which the gods hold and guide men like puppets, ruling all men in the same fashion. In place of the external-mechanistic distribution of good and lesser qualities to different human types, there is now a myth of the nature of man as such, whose character is determined by his willingness to yield himself to the pull of various noble threads. The second myth, through the puppet symbol, ‘adequately’ finitizes the experience the experience of action at the nodal point of determinants which we call, respectively, the ‘I’ and ‘world-transcendent being.’ The first myth was ‘false’ because the *Politeia* system of myths as a whole is geared toward the mystical type of man and neglects the differing inner tensions



even for philosophers, the dogma of *The Laws* is true only for everyone else. However, for an order constituted in reality rather than in speech, this may have to be true enough.

#### IV. Conclusion

Voegelin finds that the minimum dogma of *The Laws* represents the point where the fervor for “seemly” symbols and “true” theology wrought by the experience of the leap in being must moderate itself to the exigencies of existence. He writes in the conclusion to the introduction of the first volume of *Order and History*:

Nevertheless, the leap upward in being is not a leap out of existence. The emphatic partnership with God does not abolish partnership in the community of being at large, which includes being in mundane existence. Man and society, if they want to retain their foothold in being that makes the leap into emphatic partnership possible, must remain adjusted to the mundane order of existence.<sup>54</sup>

There is awareness in the older Plato “that the new truth about being is not a substitute for, but an addition to the old truth.”<sup>55</sup>

Beyond this awareness of the truth of the old myth, there is a concern for the safeguarding of the order preserved by it. Voegelin concludes:

Moreover, there is a new awareness that an attack on the unseemly symbolizations of order may destroy order itself with the faith in its analogies, that it is better to see the truth obscurely than not at all, that imperfect attunement to the order of being is preferable to disorder. The intolerance inspired by the love of being is balanced by a new tolerance, inspired by the love of existence and a respect for the tortuous ways on which man moves historically closer to the true

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of the ‘common man’ so that the story of the metals was required as an external expedient to hold together a human community consisting not only of mystics. The different quality of the two myths makes itself also felt in that the first myth is emotionally well-nigh indifferent, while the puppet symbol in Plato’s representation evokes the awe of transcendence, the ‘numinous’ in the sense of Rudolf Otto.” Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, tran. Gerhart Niemeyer (South Bend: Notre Dame, 1978; Columbia: Missouri, 1990), 22-23.

<sup>54</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, 1: 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

order of being. In the *Epinomis* Plato speaks the last word of his wisdom –that every myth has its truth.<sup>56</sup>

It is in this context of preferring an imperfect attunement to order to disorder that the shift in purpose of minimum dogmas from the intolerance of Xenophanes and Plato to the tolerance of the later theorists treated in this study is to be understood.

Each of the subsequent theorists in this study wrote in the context of a society already differentiated by the leaps in being of Hellenic and Hebraic civilization. In this context, minimum dogma ceased to be a useful tool in the elimination of unseemly symbols since these symbols occurred in complex systems of theology developed by the further differentiation, or, perhaps, in some cases degradation, of the minimum dogmas of the initial break with cosmological symbolization. Complex theology now determined seemliness and unseemliness, piety and impiety, rather than the simple theology of the minimum dogmas. With this complexity arises contention, as fewer symbolizations of the experience of the divine are deemed acceptable. In the wars of religion that formed and followed the Protestant Reformation, this contention rose to the point that it threatened the existence of the society that the contending theologies hoped to infuse with meaning. In such circumstances, minimum dogma arises as a tool to lower the requirements set by systems of theology upon representation of the divine in the interest of finding an “imperfect attunement to the order of being is preferable to disorder.” The following chapter examines two theorists whose work includes minimum dogmas with this end in mind with the theoretical insights examined in this chapter.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO MINIMUM DOGMA AND TOLERATION: MORE AND SPINOZA

### I. Introduction

Plato's minimum dogma and its antecedent, Xenophanes' attack of the poets as unseemly, both had the effect of restricting the field of tolerable representations of transcendent truth. By the time of John Locke's work centuries later, minimum dogma had become a theoretical tool for the expansion of this same field. This chapter of the study is dedicated to the investigation of this reversal. This investigation will begin with a treatment of the religious toleration and minimum dogma found in More's *Utopia*. This treatment will be the most substantial because of the striking similarities between the minimum dogma of the Utopians and that of Locke. Following this treatment will be an investigation of the minimum dogma advocated in the work of Spinoza. The chapter will conclude with a short comparison of the minimum dogmas of these two thinkers and that of Locke. The more substantial treatment of Locke's thought will be reserved for the third chapter of this study.

### II. More's Utopians

In his *Utopia*, St. Thomas More connects teachings on religious toleration to a minimum dogma. Minimum dogmas and their antecedents discussed so far in this study have had the aim of rendering fewer beliefs and actions tolerable to their host societies. This aim is obviously in conflict with the purpose of the minimum dogma held by More's Utopians, the purpose of finding the maximum toleration of beliefs that may be safely held by society. The similarity of this purpose to that of Locke in his *Letter Concerning*

*Toleration* indicates that a closer examination of these teachings in More's *Utopia* may be fruitful to the investigation of the works of Locke.<sup>57</sup>

More's account of the minimum dogma and tolerance of the Utopians is found under the heading, "On the Religions of Utopia," in Book Two of *Utopia*. Raphael Hythloday, the character whose description of Utopia More claims to retell in his *Utopia*, recalls "a number of different religions in Utopia" with each city of the island containing "adherents of different faiths."<sup>58</sup> Many of the Utopians are described as adhering to a milieu of analogical symbols similar to that milieu found by Voegelin to exist before the leap in being. Hythloday explains:

Some worship the sun as their god, others the moon, and others one of the planets. Some Utopians believe that a certain human being, who was remarkable, long ago, either for his virtue or his vanity, was not only a god, but the supreme god.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Voegelin's statement in his *History of Political Ideas* that "the construction of More agrees in all essential points with the later Lockean idea of tolerance and the separation of church and state." *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, vol. 22, *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 4, *Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (Columbia: Missouri, 1998), 117.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Thomas More, Saint, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 144.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-145; This milieu is ameliorated by a certain degree of differentiation. Hythloday explains: "Though all the other religions hold beliefs that differ from those of the majority, they all agree that there is one supreme power responsible for the construction of the universe and its fate. In the local language he is known by all as Mithra. But they disagree among themselves in that they describe this spirit in different ways. Each takes the characteristic that it believes to be most important and claims this is the fundamental attribute of that supreme being whose absolute authority over creation is recognized by the common consent of every nation. But slowly over time they are abandoning the present variety of superstitions, and uniting in one religion, which seems more rational than all the others. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the others would all have disappeared long ago, if people thinking of changing their religion did not, out of fear, interpret any unlucky event that occurred to them as a result not of chance but of divine intervention, as if the god whose worship they were thinking of abandoning was punishing the impiety they were planning to commit." *Ibid.*, 145.

However, Hythloday recounts that most Utopians, “including nearly all the wiser citizens,” hold what may be considered a more differentiated position:

They believe there is one divinity, which is unknown, eternal, unmeasurable [*sic*], inexplicable, beyond the capacity of man’s understanding, and present throughout the universe, though not as a physical body, but rather through its influence. They call it the parent of all that exists. The origins, progress, multiplication, vicissitudes, and ends of all things they attribute to him alone, and they do not worship any other being as divine.<sup>60</sup>

One is again forced to recall the preceding chapter’s presentation of Voegelin’s work where such beliefs about divinity arose in order to oppose the preexisting milieu of symbols. This is not the case for the otherwise similar Utopian beliefs.

Hythloday uses the occasion of the punishment of one of the many of the Utopians who were enthusiastically converted when exposed to the teachings of Christianity by Hythloday and his companions to explain the toleration of the Utopians.<sup>61</sup> According to Hythloday, the new convert “began to preach the Christian religion in public with more enthusiasm than good sense.” Though Hythloday and his companions warned him “to be more prudent, ...he grew more and more hot-headed [*sic*].”

Hythloday continues:

He not only maintained that our religion was better than any of theirs, but insisted that theirs were worthless. He ranted away, saying that their religions were wicked, and that those who believed in them were godless and sacrilegious, and would be condemned to eternal damnation. After he had held forth in this manner on numerous occasions they arrested him. They tried him, not for insulting their religions, but for behavior likely to provoke a riot, found him guilty, and sentenced him to exile. For they believe that one of the oldest principles, respected by their legal system, is that no one should be punished for his religious beliefs.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Wootton in a footnote here remarks, “By contrast, when More became Lord Chancellor in 1529 he played a leading role in intensifying the persecution of Protestants.”

They attribute this principle to Utopos [the general credited with conquering Utopia and founding its regime] himself and to the founding of Utopia. For Utopos had heard that the natives, before his arrival, were in bitter conflict over religious differences. And he recognized that where a community is divided into conflicting sects, these sects are unable to cooperate to defend their country against an outside attack, for it was this that had given him the opportunity to defeat them one by one. Once he had conquered them, one of his first decrees was that every individual should be free to follow the religion of his or her choice, and even to make every effort to convert others to it, as long as he makes the case for his own beliefs calmly and moderately and relies on rational arguments. If urging the merits of his own religion proves ineffectual, he may not bitterly attack the beliefs of others. He must abstain from abuse and must never threaten violence. Anyone who blatantly enters into conflicts over religion is to be punished with exile or slavery.<sup>63</sup>

Hythloday claims that this law was introduced “not only in order to ensure peace, which he saw being utterly extinguished by constant conflicts and irreconcilable enmities, but also because he believed such a law would serve in the interest of religion itself.”<sup>64</sup>

Hythloday explains Utopos’s reasoning:

In matters of faith he thought it would be foolhardy to dogmatize, for he considered it possible that God wants to be worshipped in varied and diverse ways, and so inspires different people to different faiths. In any event, he was certain that to try to compel everyone else by means of threats and violence to believe what you yourself happen to believe is both arrogant and ineffectual.<sup>65</sup>

If it was not the case “that God wants to be worshipped in varied and diverse ways,” that is “that there is only one true religion, and all the rest are false,” Utopos was sure that the truth religion would have the position of strength “as long as people confined themselves to moderate and reasonable discussion.” Utopos feared that if people were not so confined and “if riots and wars are allowed to decide the outcome, then, since the worst

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

men are often the most determined, the best and most sacred religion would die out, smothered under foolish superstitions, just as wheat is overgrown by thorns and weeds.”<sup>66</sup>

The Utopians make two exceptions to the freedom of “each person ... to believe what he thinks right.” These constitute what, for the purposes of this study, will be considered the minimum dogma of the Utopians. Utopos “solemnly and severely forbade,” first, that “anyone to deny the fundamental dignity of his own nature to the point of believing that the soul perishes with the body,” and, second, that anyone claim “that the world is governed by mere chance and providence has no part to play.”<sup>67</sup>

Hythloday describes the reasoning behind this minimum dogma and its enforcement:

Thus they all believe that after we die our vices will be severely punished and our virtues will be generously rewarded. Anyone who denies this they do not think worthy to be called a human being, since in such a person’s opinion their soul, which is truly sublime, is fundamentally no better than the foul body of a mere beast. Even less are they willing to consider them as fellow citizen, for they know that, but for the fear of punishment, they would have nothing but contempt for the laws and customs of society. For who can doubt that someone who has nothing to fear but the authorities, and who has no hope of surviving after death, will not hesitate to break the communal laws of their own country for the sake of some private advantage, as long as they think they can avoid detection or can resist arrest. Consequently, anyone who holds such views is barred from receiving any honors, is condemned never to be promoted to any position of authority, and is excluded from all positions where others would depend on them. Everyone treats them as if they were congenitally worthless and good for nothing. But they impose no punishment, for they are convinced that no one has the capacity to freely choose what they believe. Nor do they bring pressure to bear on such people to ensure that they conceal their convictions; on the contrary, they do not tolerate any form of deceit or misrepresentation, and they loathe dissimulation, in the belief that it is a short step from deception to crime. They merely forbid them to muster arguments in support of their beliefs when they are in the presence of the uneducated. But when they are alone with the priests and people of standing, they not only permit them but positively encourage them to enter into debate, for

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

they sincerely believe that in the end even the mad will acknowledge the force of superior arguments.<sup>68</sup>

The similarity of this minimum dogma to that found in Plato's *Republic* (see the preceding chapter), not to mention the remainder of the Utopian institutions, so obviously reflects More's familiarity with Plato's work that a painstaking dissection of their similarities is unnecessary. The minimum dogma of the *Utopia* makes a crucial break with that of *The Republic* beyond the obvious difference in their contents; the two differ in their proposed effect on society. Plato in effect restricts the representation of the divine with his minimum dogma while that of the Utopians relaxes such restrictions, just as that of Locke. It remains to be seen, however, whether More's *Utopia* is in fact an argument for such a move or if this expansion of toleration through minimum dogma is merely a component of the dramatic action of the work.

More's own position on the toleration and minimum dogma espoused by the Utopians is open to debate. While biographical evidence, such as Wootton's editorial note of the role More took "in intensifying the persecution of Protestants" in England upon becoming Lord Chancellor thirteen years after the publication of *Utopia*,<sup>69</sup> is useful in dispelling the most idealistic misinterpretations of the relevant texts of *Utopia*, such evidence is insufficient for a definitive interpretation of More's position. An examination of the tension, ambivalence, and contradiction that More injects into his account of Utopia is much more useful in this task.

The ambivalence of *Utopia* begins with the title of the work. The word "Utopia" is a deliberately ambiguous transliteration from Greek with two different translations.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 147-148.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 146n.



The first, and more famous, translation, “No Place,” infuses the account of Utopia with an irony that reaches a climax in one of the work’s earliest uses of the word, that is in Hythloday’s question, “What if I should repeat to them the policies Plato describes in his imaginary republic or tell them about what the Utopians actually do?”<sup>70</sup> Ambivalence returns, however, as the second translation, “Happy Place,” serves to undermine this carefully crafted irony.<sup>71</sup>

More also injects irony into the text with Hythloday’s name, which may be translated something like, “speaker of nonsense.” This irony in the account of Utopia is again made ambivalent by More’s positioning himself as Hythloday’s dialectical opponent. More depicts the character bearing his name as having doubts about Hythloday’s approach to politics in Book One of *Utopia* and about Hythloday’s account of Utopia in Book Two. While such positioning is typically interpreted as yet another hint that Hythloday’s account is to be treated with a degree of skepticism, a subtler reading indicates an additional layer to this positioning that again relieves this irony. This layer is the play that may be made with More’s name, which when treated by the same rules of translation as “Utopia” and “Hythloday” may be rendered as “Fool.” This is rendering is more than plausible when one considers that More was already aware of this rendering of his name from Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*, a work published and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 84; cf. Machiavelli’s statement: “But since my intent is to write something useful to whoever understands it, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing rather than to the imagination of it. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation.” Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2d ed., trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: Chicago, 1998), 61.

<sup>71</sup> That More intended both of these meanings for “Utopia” is confirmed in his included “Poems of Utopia.” More, *Utopia*, 48.

dedicated to More only a few years before the dramatic setting of the *Utopia*. The complexity of the relation of More to the Utopians' beliefs on toleration becomes readily apparent when one realizes that these beliefs are part of a retort by "Nonsense" to the reasoning of "Folly."

A critique of Eric Voegelin's treatment of More's *Utopia* and its minimum dogma in his *History of Political Ideas* is valuable in the attempt to understand this complexity. This treatment of More is the most substantial by Voegelin available, but suffers from predating many of the most important phases in Voegelin's scholarship as well as by being part of a course of study abandoned by Voegelin due to what he deemed a fallacy in approach.<sup>72</sup> Voegelin finds that "the *Utopia* is a dialogue," with his character

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. Eric Voegelin *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1989), chap. 17; In the interest of an accurate representation of Voegelin's position on More, I must note that this study has found no evidence that Voegelin ever revisited his position on More or that later breakthroughs in his scholarship ameliorated his position. As late as *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, the publication of Voegelin's inaugural lecture at the University of Munich, Voegelin writes: "In his *Utopia* More traces the image of man and society that he considers perfect. To this perfection belongs the abolition of private property. Because he had the benefit of an excellent theological education, however, More is well aware that this perfect state cannot be achieved in the world. Man's lust for possessions is deeply rooted in original sin, in *superbia* in the Augustinian sense. In the final part of his work when More looks over his finished picture, he has to admit that it would all be possible if only there were not the 'serpent of *superbia*.' But there *is* the serpent of *superbia* –and More would not think of denying it. This raises the question of the peculiar psychopathological condition in which a man like More must have found himself when he drew up the mode of the perfect society in history, in full consciousness that it could never be realized because of original sin." Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, vol. 5, *Modernity Without Restraint*, vol. 4, ed. Manfred Henningsen (Columbia: Missouri, 2000), 305-306. This implication of a "peculiar psychopathological condition" recalls his *History of Political Ideas* treatment. The implication that something "smells" in the manner that the Utopians wage war comes to mind. Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 4:127-128. It must be further noted, though, that Voegelin's treatment of More beginning with *Anamnesis* lacks such attacks. However, none of these treatments examined by this study reflect any repudiation of

representing “one side of his position” while Hythloday represents that side’s counterarguments. Voegelin finds that the debate between these two sides “remains inconclusive.”<sup>73</sup> Voegelin’s assessment to this point is consistent with the findings of this study; however, difficulties emerge with Voegelin’s further characterization of each side of this debate.

Voegelin is not impressed with the distinction of the dialogue’s More “between school philosophy (*philosophia scholastica*) and polite philosophy (*philosophia civilior*).” Voegelin finds in this “polite philosophy,” which “knows its place, does not abstractly hold a truth to be opportune in every situation, does not talk out of turn, and does not, like a bad actor, disturb the play at hand,” what is today called “the argument of the ‘collaborator.’”<sup>74</sup> Neither is Voegelin particularly impressed with the alternative offered by Hythloday. As Voegelin finds that More the character’s argument is “disappointing because it is opportunistic and dodges the spiritual issues,” Voegelin believes that Hythloday, as the other partner in the dialogue, should properly address these issues. Instead Voegelin finds only “the humanistic traveler who has withdrawn in resignation.” Voegelin explains:

The tension as a whole occurs in the field of humanistic, political sentiments. The true alternative, the life of the spirit, remains beyond the horizon.<sup>75</sup>

This avoidance of “life of the spirit” by More surprises Voegelin since “one would expect that a man who existentially was on the verge of becoming a monk would understand the

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Voegelin’s earlier work on More, nor are any of these treatments of significant length or reflective of new work on More.

<sup>73</sup> Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 4:116; cf. Thomas S. Engeman, “Hythloday’s Utopia and More’s England,” *The Journal of Politics* 44, no. 1 (1982): 135.

<sup>74</sup> Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 4: 115.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

problem of the ‘world’ and not attempt to evade it by argument that is an insult to intelligence.”<sup>76</sup>

Voegelin attempts an explanation of this incongruity:

The key to this enigma can perhaps be found in a passage of the *Utopia* in which Raphael describes the attitude of the islanders towards the members of a strict, sectarian order that has formed among them. The Utopians tolerate this order because they respect every conduct that is motivated by “religion” as long as it does not disturb the more easygoing creed of the others. They themselves, however, are hedonists and rationalists. “Anybody who would prefer celibacy to matrimony, or a hard life to an easy one, as a matter of reason would be laughed at.”<sup>77</sup> *Ratio* and *religio* are opposed as principles of ordering conduct. The utopian commonwealth lives by the order of reason; religion is reduced to a deistic minimum dogma consisting of the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, punishment and reward in the beyond, and the rule of Providence.<sup>78</sup> And even this minimum dogma is retained only for the utilitarian reason that without it the laws of the commonwealth might not be sufficient to keep the good people on the narrow path.<sup>79</sup> The construction of More agrees in all essential points with the later Lockean idea of tolerance and the separation of church and state. The official Deism with its rites, but without a systematic theology that may stir up problems, lets everybody believe what he wants, provided that he does not claim public recognition. Assuming the obvious, that nobody can conceive and with loving care elaborate this idea unless it occupies his imagination intensely, we may say that the idea of the *Christianitas* as the mystical body of Christ, articulated into its spiritual and temporal orders with equal public rank, had lost its hold over the sentiments of More at least to the degree that, at least in this phase of his life, the spiritual order was no longer experienced as a representative public order in the commonwealth. The life of the spirit had become a private affair and, since as a mystic his personality was not strong enough to stand for itself, the temporal order had become the secular commonwealth, with the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Voegelin here cites Joseph F Lupton’s *The Utopia of Thomas More* (Oxford, 1895), 282; this corresponds to Sir Thomas More, Saint, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. David Wootton, 150.

<sup>78</sup> Voegelin here cites Lupton’s *The Utopia of Thomas More*, 274; this corresponds to Sir Thomas More, Saint, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. David Wootton, 147.

<sup>79</sup> Voegelin here in a footnote relates the previously discussed incident of the overzealous convert to Christianity. He finds: “The point is that the culprit was removed, not because he cast aspersions on the established religion, but because he stirred up the people (*reus excitati in populo tumultus*). The scene foreshadows the program that later was treated by Dostoevsky in the *Grand Inquisitor* (*Utopia*, ed. Lupton, 270).” This citation corresponds to Sir Thomas More, Saint, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. David Wootton, 146.

monopoly of public representation, retaining as much of Christian traditions as historical circumstances had left at the moment.<sup>80</sup>

This study contends that the tension in the dialogue of *Utopia* has more spiritual depth than Voegelin acknowledges. Key to understanding this depth is the utter lack of the Christian concept of “Grace” in Hythloday’s account of Utopia. The Utopians are converted to Christianity after hearing Hythloday and his companions “speak of Christ and describe his teaching, his way of life, and the miracles he performed, and recount the equally extraordinary constancy of so many martyrs, whose blood, willingly shed, has brought so many nations, scattered far and wide, to adopt their religion.”<sup>81</sup> Noticeably absent from this list is any mention of Christ’s Crucifixion or Resurrection, the Apostles’ teachings, or doctrines related to grace such as Atonement. The Eucharist, the central subject of More’s later polemics against the Reformation of England and the medium for delivering grace in Catholic theology,<sup>82</sup> may be included by implication when Hythloday mentions the Utopians need for a Christian bishop “to confer upon them those sacraments which we believe can be administered only by a priest,” but this mention is an insufficient basis to contradict the finding of an absence of grace, especially when further evidence is considered.<sup>83</sup>

Three pieces of evidence, in particular, causes one to doubt that the Utopians could even understand the imagery of the Eucharist or the atonement of sin imparted by it for three reasons. First, the Utopian religion has no experience of atonement through

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<sup>80</sup> Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 4: 116-117.

<sup>81</sup> More, *Utopia*, 145.

<sup>82</sup> For a useful analysis of More’s polemics see “Thomas More as a Controversialist” in the Introduction in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. J.B. Trapp, vol. 9, *The Apology* (New Haven: Yale, 1979), xix-xli.

<sup>83</sup> More, *Utopia*, 146.

sacrifice upon which to build a theology of atonement through Christ's death and resurrection. Hythloday recounts the Utopian view of animal sacrifice, "They slaughter no animals during their ceremonies, for they do not believe that a merciful God, who bestowed life on living creatures so that they might live, can take pleasure in bloodshed and slaughter."<sup>84</sup> Given this view, it is doubtful that they would believe that a merciful God would require the blood of His Son for the wrongs of others. The second piece of evidence is that the Christian concept of grace may not be tolerated by the Utopians' minimum dogma. Hythloday says that all the Utopians "believe that after we die our vices will be severely punished and our virtues will be generously rewarded."<sup>85</sup> This does not square that easily with the Christian idea of redemption through grace by which vices may be forgiven. Finally, there is reason to doubt that the Utopians even need grace. Utopia represents a society built without the "serpent of hell" that is pride (*superbia*).<sup>86</sup> Theologically this is *the* original sin that requires redemption through grace. Lacking original sin, the Utopians may thus lack the need for grace.<sup>87</sup>

The lack of grace in Hythloday's account acts in dialectical tension with the overabundance of grace that More's "polite philosophy" allows to itself. More is well aware of the problems of the side of the dialogue that he attributes to himself; he does not need the memory of Vichy collaboration to know the danger of "polite philosophy." One may surmise that More finds neither the infinitely forgivable compromise demanded by his own voice nor the perfection demanded by Hythloday's satisfactory, hence their

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>87</sup> For further analysis of the incompatibility of Christianity with Utopian society see Engeman, 141-142.

attribution to the respective voices of “folly” and “nonsense.” The tension thus created is not confined to “the field of humanistic, political sentiments,” but rather constitutes a demand for an answer beyond this field.<sup>88</sup>

It is within this context that More’s position relative to the Utopian religious toleration and minimum dogma must be explored. First, it is doubtful that More believed that toleration, as practiced by the Utopians, would be suitable for a world where people were still driven by pride. Even if had More shared Utopos’s confidence that, “as long as people confined themselves to moderate and reasonable discussion, the truth would have the advantage and would eventually prevail,” he would have no confidence that, in a world full of the proud, people would so confine themselves. And since in the world of the proud constituting reality “riots and wars are allowed to decide the outcome,” then More knows that “the best and most sacred” religion’s only hope, short of divine intervention, is that better men are more determined than the worst.<sup>89</sup> Second, if, as this study concluded above, More intends the dialectical tension of *Utopia* to point beyond the field of “humanistic, political sentiments” to a life of the spirit, then it is also doubtful More wishes to foster any sort of secular, proto-Lockean civil society. The similarity of the ideas advocated by Hythloday to those of Locke, far from indicating More’s advocacy

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<sup>88</sup> This analysis of the tension in More’s *Utopia* is indebted to the tensions between love and justice, between creature and creator, and within grace explored by the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. Of particular value are his essays “The Power and Weakness of God,” “The Assurance of Grace,” “Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist,” and “Augustine’s Political Realism.” *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale, 1986), 21-32, 61-71, 102-119, 123-141; for an interpretation of Niebuhr’s work see Cecil L. Eubanks, “Reinhold Niebuhr: The Dialectics of Grace and Power,” *The Political Science Reviewer* 8 (Fall 1978): 63-102.

<sup>89</sup> More, *Utopia*, 147; Though *Utopia* predates the Protestant Reformation’s religious wars, the recently completed (1492) Christian reconquest of the entirety of Spain and the textual evidence that the More was well aware of the part force had to play in religion.

of a Lockean regime, probably indicates that More would also find these ideas unsatisfactory, and more, that he might go so far as to find in Locke another speaker of “nonsense.”

### III. Spinoza’s Minimum Dogma

This study found More notable for joining the ideas of minimum toleration to those of toleration. Spinoza will be found notable for going beyond More by advocating this conjunction explicitly, rather than as a component of a dialogue, and, additionally, by not believing in the minimum dogma he espouses.<sup>90</sup> Before delving further into these remarkable traits, it is necessary to examine exactly what Spinoza’s minimum dogma entails and how it interacts with Spinoza’s teachings on toleration.

Spinoza constructs his minimum dogma in the fourteenth chapter of *A Theologico-Political Treatise*. There he finds that “faith consists in a knowledge of God, without which obedience to Him would be impossible, and which the mere fact of obedience implies.” He further finds “that faith does not demand that dogmas should be true as that they should be pious.” Following this then, Spinoza has “no further fear” in finding that “the dogmas of the universal faith” all tend only to the doctrine “that there exists a God, that is, a Supreme Being, Who loves justice and charity, and Who must be obeyed by whosoever would be saved; [and] that the worship of this Being consists in the practice of justice and love towards one’s neighbour.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, vol. 25, *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 7, *The New Order and the Last Orientation*, ed. Jürgen Gebhardt and Thomas A. Hollweck (Columbia: Missouri, 1999), 134-135.

<sup>91</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, chap. 14; All translations from Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*, tran. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951).



These “dogmas of the universal faith” consist exclusively of the following seven doctrines. (1) “God or a Supreme Being exists,” and “whoever is ignorant of or disbelieves in His existence cannot obey him...” (2) God “is One” since “devotion, admiration, and love spring from the superiority of one over all else.” (3) God is either omnipresent or “all things are open to Him, for if anything could be supposed concealed from Him, we might doubt or be ignorant of the equity of His judgment as directing all things.” (4) “All things are bound to obey” God, yet God “is not bound to obey any.” (5) “...The worship of God consist only in justice and charity, or love towards one’s neighbour.” (6) All those, but only those, “who obey God by their manner of life are saved....” The “rest of mankind” is lost. “If we did not believe this, there would be no reason for obeying God rather than pleasure.” (7) “...God forgives the sins of those who repent.” This is necessary because “without this belief all would despair of salvation” since “no one is free from sin....”<sup>92</sup>

Spinoza justifies all of these doctrines, with the exception of the fifth, on the grounds that they lead to obedience. This fifth doctrine, in which Spinoza claims to describe the worship of God in its entirety, explains the content of this obedience that is the aim of the remainder of the doctrines. Considering these doctrines as a whole, it seems that the entire minimum dogma exists solely to encourage justice and “love towards one’s neighbour.” The utility of such dogma, coupled with Spinoza’s earlier finding “that faith does not demand that dogmas should be true as that they should be pious,” not to mention his teachings in his *Ethics*, leads to the conclusion that Spinoza does not believe the minimum dogma he espouses. Voegelin explains the danger of this:

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

The position of Spinoza differs, moreover, from that of his predecessors [the previous formulators of minimum dogma] insofar as he himself did not believe in the minimum dogma but advanced it as a bit of exoteric political advice for the satisfaction of the multitude. The ideas of Spinoza are, therefore, the first high point of the new development, indicated previously,<sup>93</sup> toward psychological management of the masses by playing on their convictions in order to keep them satisfied, while the player himself does not necessarily share them.<sup>94</sup>

This totalitarian tendency, in which “the statesman” becomes “the spiritual director of the people,” found by Voegelin in Spinoza’s minimum dogma, is explained by Voegelin as a symptom of an evolution toward the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century that began with “the breakdown of church civilization that could integrate the primitive image worshipper and the imageless mystic in one spiritual whole.”<sup>95</sup>

Spinoza’s mysticism is central to Voegelin’s entire interpretation of his work as found in his *History of Political Ideas*. Voegelin even introduces his chapter on Spinoza with Novalis’s claim, “*Spinoza ist ein gottrunkener Mensch.*”<sup>96</sup> This “God-intoxication” of Spinoza begins in a mystic ascent recounted in *On the Improvement of the Understanding*. Spinoza writes, “After experience had taught me that all the usual surroundings of social life are vain and futile; seeing that none of the objects of my fears

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<sup>93</sup> See Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 7: 70.

<sup>94</sup> Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 7: 135; cf. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. 18, for what might also be justified as such a highpoint; Voegelin repudiates the claim that Spinoza was the first to do this and softens this treatment of Spinoza’s minimum dogma in his later treatment of *The Laws* of Plato as discussed in the previous chapter of this study: “Of particular interest is his [Spinoza’s] attempt to formulate a creed for the people. He tried to solve his problem through the creation of a minimum set of dogmas that would leave the utmost liberty to individuals who might wish to embellish the bare structure with details of their own, while it would be sufficient as a religious bond for the political community. Moreover, Spinoza the mystic needed the dogma for himself no more than Plato, but created it deliberately, as did Plato, for the mass of men whose spiritual strength is weak and who can absorb the spirit only in the form of dogmatic symbols.” Voegelin, *Order and History*, 3: 263-4.

<sup>95</sup> Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 7: 135.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

contained in themselves anything either good or bad, except in so far as the mind is affected by them, I finally resolved to inquire whether there might be some real good having power to communicate itself, which would affect the mind singly, to the exclusion of all else; whether, in fact, there might be anything of which the discovery and attainment would enable me to enjoy continuous, supreme, and unending happiness.”<sup>97</sup> In this inquiry, Spinoza determines that “love towards a thing eternal and infinite feeds the mind wholly with joy, and is itself unmingled with any sadness.”<sup>98</sup> Spinoza identifies this object of love with the whole of Nature.<sup>99</sup> Spinoza goes on to describe the mankind’s “chief good”:

The chief good is that he should arrive, together with other individuals if possible, at the aforesaid character [“a human character much more stable than his own”]. What that character is we shall show in due time, namely, that it is the knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature. This, then, is the end for which I strive, to attain to such a character myself, and to endeavor that many should attain to it with me. In other words, it is part of my happiness to lend a helping hand, that many others may understand even as I do, so that their understanding and desire may entirely agree with my own. In order to bring this about, it is necessary to understand as much of nature as will enable us to attain the aforesaid character, and also to form a social order such as most conducive to the attainment of his character by the greatest number with the least difficulty and danger.<sup>100</sup>

It is in this context of securing a social order “with the least difficulty and danger” that both Spinoza’s spiritually manipulative minimum dogma and his advocacy of toleration are to be understood. With this in mind, the complex of minimum dogma and toleration in Spinoza’s thought can be examined in its entirety.

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<sup>97</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics Including the Improvement of the Understanding*, tran. R. H. M. Elwes (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1989), 1.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5; this treatment of Spinoza’s mysticism closely follows that of Voegelin in Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 7: 127-128.

This complex is formed when Spinoza incorporates his minimum dogma his minimum dogma into the aristocratic regime in *A Political Treatise*. Spinoza details this accomplishment:

Matters concerning religion we have set forth at sufficient length in our Theologico-Political Treatise. Yet certain points we then omitted, of which it was not there the place to treat; for instance, that all the patricians must be of the same religion, that is, of that most simple and general religion, which in that treatise we described. For it is above all to be avoided, that the patricians themselves should be divided into sects, and show favour, some to this, and others to that, and thence become mastered by superstition, and try to deprive the subjects of the liberty to speak out his opinion, yet great conventicles [*sic*] are to be forbidden. And, therefore, those that are attached to another religion are, indeed, to be allowed to build as many temples as they please; yet these are to be small, and limited to a certain standard of size, and on sites at some little distance one from another. But it is very important, that the temples consecrated to the national religion should be large and costly, and that only patricians or senators should be allowed to administer its principal rites, and thus that patricians only be suffered to baptize, celebrate marriages, and lay on hands, and that in general they be recognized as the priests of the temples and the champions and interpreters of the national religion. But, for preaching, and to manage the church treasury and its daily business, let some persons be chosen from the commons by the senate itself, to be, as it were, the senate's deputies, and, therefore, bound to render it account of everything.<sup>101</sup>

With this incorporation of minimum dogma as the state religion of the aristocracy, Spinoza's program may now be assessed in full.

Spinoza's spiritual manipulation is not concerned primarily with the masses but with the ruling aristocracy of the regime he advocates.<sup>102</sup> The purpose of the manipulation of the minimum dogma, as discussed above, was to make its believers obedient to a god who is properly worshipped only by pursuing justice and the love of one's neighbor. Further, other dogmas with the same effect are to be left alone. The

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<sup>101</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *A Political Treatise*, 8.46.

<sup>102</sup> This is not enough to free Spinoza of the charges of nascent totalitarianism, however. One must recall that in the totalitarian regime portrayed in George Orwell's *1984* the masses, the "proles," were left without ideological indoctrination. One must dig deeper to clear this charge.

intended effect of the minimum dogma is to provide a sufficient spiritual cohesion for society's aristocracy (with the assistance of grandiose temples and other measures) so that the remainder of society will be left alone as long as they are just and charitable. Spinoza apparently hopes that room will be found beneath the aristocracy within this remainder for himself and "the greatest number" to pursue "with the least difficulty and danger" the mystical "knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature."

#### IV. Conclusion

First, it is important to note that no direct connection of the thought of Locke with the thought of More or Spinoza is meant to be implied by this chapter. Neither is such a connection necessary in order for the analysis done in this chapter to be fruitful in the investigation of the minimum dogma of Locke, nor is such a connection tenable, especially in the case of Spinoza. In his *Second Reply to the Bishop of Worcester* Locke writes:

I am not so well read in Hobbes or Spinoza [*sic*] as to be able to say what were their opinions in this matter. But possibly there be those, who will think your lordship's authority of more use to them in the case than those justly decried names; and be glad to find your lordship a patron of oracles of reason, so little to the advantage of the oracles of divine revelation.<sup>103</sup>

The preceding analysis of the minimum dogmas in the work of More and Spinoza is meant to further develop theoretical tools for the analysis of the minimum dogmas found in the work of Locke.

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<sup>103</sup> *The Collected Works of John Locke*, vol. 4 (London: 1823), 477; cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago, 1953), 209-212 and John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. with an introduction by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge: 1988), 74, where the truth of Locke's statement here is found questionable.

In the analysis of the minimum dogma of the Utopians this study found an instance of a minimum dogma instituted for the purpose of preserving the peace of society rather than the purpose of preserving the achievement of clarity about the truth of existence. The preservation of peace will be found in the next chapter to be the explicit purpose behind the minimum dogma advocated by Locke in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* and the probable purpose behind the minimum dogma found in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*. However, the closer analysis of More's work in *Utopia* indicates that the minimum dogma of the Utopians is intended to be only one pole in a tension, which beyond offering a viable alternative to such minimum dogma, points away from the entire field in which this minimum dogma is a sensible solution.

The analysis of Spinoza's minimum dogma did not find the ambiguity in the advocacy of minimum dogma found in the analysis of More. This does not necessarily place Spinoza in a position of agreement with Locke, however. Though the minimum dogmas of both thinkers have an immediate end in promoting a safe and stable society, Locke's minimum dogmas lack the Spinoza's ultimate end of a mystical attainment of knowledge. Locke does not have any great concern either for the importance of spiritual cohesion or for the piety of those that rule. Analysis beyond these differences will be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE MINIMUM DOGMA, TOLERATION, AND LOCKE

### I. Introduction

The minimum dogma found in the work of John Locke represents a break in the form of minimum dogma that has occupied this study so far. Each of the previous manifestations of minimum dogma at least had the end of adequately representing the divine or of sheltering such representation, with the possible exception of the minimum dogma of the *Utopia*. John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1685) finds that government is "constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing of... civil interests... [such as] life, liberty, health, and indolency [*sic*] of the body; and the possession of outward things..."<sup>104</sup> He finds that the jurisdiction of the magistrate "neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended" beyond these things "to the salvation of souls."<sup>105</sup> Building upon this division of civil and religious interests, Locke concludes that religious belief and practice that does not interfere with civil interests should be tolerated. The minimum dogma found in Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* is constructed to illustrate which religious beliefs should be excluded from toleration on the basis that they do interfere with civil interest. This minimum dogma is constructed solely for civil ends and, therefore, breaks the preexisting form of minimum dogma as device for protecting an adequate representation of divinity.

This is not the only instance of minimum dogma in the writings of Locke, however. Corresponding to Locke's division of religious from civil interests is the delivery of a minimum dogma with ostensibly religious concerns separate from the

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<sup>104</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, 6: 5.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

previously mentioned minimum dogma with civil concerns. However, this minimum dogma, found in *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695), so conveniently supports Locke's civil aims that it can only with great hesitance be likened to previous formulations of minimum dogma. The interaction of the two minimum dogmas of Locke within the realm of civil interests will be the concern of the remainder of this chapter.

## II. Locke's Civil Dogma

As mentioned in the introduction above, Locke finds that government is instituted only for the advancement of civil interests, of which religious interests take no direct part. Locke does find that religious interests may take an indirect part in civil interests since certain religious beliefs conflict with civil interests. Locke's minimum dogma in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* identifies beliefs he finds contrary to civil interests and refuses them the toleration offered to all remaining beliefs.<sup>106</sup> Initially, Locke states that the

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<sup>106</sup> Locke considers religious beliefs in isolation from religious practices: "But as in every church there are two things especially to be considered; the outward form and rites of worship, and the doctrines and articles of faith; these things must be handled distinctly, that so the whole matter of toleration may the more clearly be understood." Ibid., 29; this chapter will treat Locke's minimum dogma of religious beliefs only since the grounds he offers for excluding religious practice are neither complicated nor particularly related to the remainder of this study: "You will say, by this rule [that "the magistrate has no power" to impose or forbid the use of any rites or ceremonies], if some congregations should have a mind to sacrifice infants, or, as the primitive Christians were falsely accused, lustfully pollute themselves in promiscuous uncleanness, or practice any other such heinous enormities, is the magistrate obliged to tolerate them, because they are committed in a religious assembly? I answer, No. These things are not lawful in the ordinary course of life, nor in any private house; and, therefore, neither are they so in the worship of God, or in any religious meeting. But, indeed, if any people congregated on account of religion, should be desirous to sacrifice a calf, I deny that that ought to be prohibited by a law. Melibœus, whose calf it is, may lawfully kill his calf at home, and burn any part of it that he thinks fit: for no injury is thereby done to any one, no prejudice to another man's goods. And for the same reason he may kill his calf also in a religious



magistrate should refuse toleration to “opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society.”<sup>107</sup> Locke finds such instances rare “for no sect can easily arrive to such a degree of madness,” so closer attention should be given to the components of the dogma that follow.<sup>108</sup>

Three components of dogma follow this first provision. First, no one is to be allowed to “arrogate to themselves, and to those of their sect, some peculiar prerogative, covered over with a specious show of deceitful words, but in effect opposite to the civil rights of the community.”<sup>109</sup> This provision, targeted at the level of practical politics against English Catholics, refuses toleration to teachings such as “faith is not to be kept with heretics” and “kings excommunicated forfeit their crowns and kingdoms.”<sup>110</sup> Second, “that church can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate, which is constituted upon such a bottom, that all those who enter into it, do thereby, *ipso facto*, deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince.”<sup>111</sup> Locke gives an example of belief not to be tolerated, probably directed against English Catholics:

It is ridiculous for anyone to profess himself to be a Mahometan [*sic*] only in religion, but in everything else a faithful subject to a Christian magistrate, whilst at the same time he acknowledges himself bound to yield blind obedience to the mufti of Constantinople; who himself is entirely obedient to the Ottoman emperor, and frames the famed oracles of that religion according to his pleasure. But this Mahometan [*sic*], living amongst Christians, would yet more apparently renounce their government, if he acknowledged the same person to be head of his church, who is the supreme magistrate in the state.<sup>112</sup>

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meeting.” Ibid., 33-34; cf. the jurisprudence on the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to the American Constitution.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.; Locke may have in mind here Levelers and similar movements.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 47.

Third, Locke denies toleration to atheists, as “promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bond of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist.”<sup>113</sup>

Problems emerge in Locke’s break with the form of previous minimum dogmas. Since Locke’s minimum dogma is derived solely from the purpose of protecting civil interests and has no relation to the truth or falsehood of the beliefs Locke refuses or admits toleration, Locke must account for the situation of someone who finds beliefs true that he does not tolerate. Locke writes concerning this situation:

But some may ask, “What if the magistrate should enjoin any thing by his authority, that appears unlawful to the conscience of a private person?” I answer, that if government be faithfully administered, and the counsels of the magistrate be indeed directed to the public good, this will seldom happen. But if perhaps it do so fall out, I say, that such a private person is to abstain from actions that he judges unlawful; and he is to undergo the punishment, which is not unlawful for him to bear; for the private judgment of any person concerning a law enacted in political matters, for the public good, does not take away the obligation of that law, nor deserve a dispensation.<sup>114</sup>

It is doubtful, however, that many people can be expected to willingly accept such punishment. This necessitates that Locke frame his arguments concerning his minimum dogma for civil interests as consistent with his surrounding Christian society.

Locke begins his *Letter Concerning Toleration* with the statement, “I esteem that toleration to be the chief characteristical [*sic*] mark of the true Church.”<sup>115</sup> Locke explains his foundation for such a finding:

For whatsoever some people boast of the antiquity of places and names, or of the pomp of their outward worship; others, of the reformation of their discipline; all, of the orthodoxy of their faith (for everyone is orthodox to himself): these things, and all others of this nature, are much rather marks of men striving for empire over one another, than of the Church of Christ. Let anyone have never so true a claim to all these things, yet if he be destitute of charity, meekness, and good-will in general towards all mankind, even to those who are not Christians, he is

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 5.

certainly yet short of being a true Christian himself. “The kings of the Gentiles exercise Lordship over them, [*sic*] said our Saviour to his disciples, but [*sic*] ye shall not be so, Luke xxii. 25, 26. [*sic*]<sup>116</sup>

Locke reasons further on the same line, “If Christians are to be admonished that they abstain from all manner of revenge, even after repeated provocations and multiplied injuries, how much more ought they to suffer nothing, who have had no harm done them, forbear violence, and abstain from all manner of ill-usage towards those from whom they have received none!”<sup>117</sup>

Locke’s interpretation of Christianity as a religion distinguished by its toleration has an obvious derivation from a number of passages of scripture. Locke’s address on the Christian admonition against revenge seems to take into account the commands of Jesus found in the “Sermon on the Mount” such as:

Do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.” (Matthew 5:39-41 UNASB)

The distinction noted above that Locke finds between the care of the soul and the care of the commonwealth seems to take account Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s,” (Matthew 22: 21 UNASB) and his reply to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” (John 19: 36 UNASB)

Locke’s use of such Christian teachings is not without difficulties, however.

While these teachings do have many of the implications for religious toleration indicated by Locke, they also have implications that undermine Locke’s other political teachings.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 22.

There is no logic by which a strict insistence upon these admonitions may be made concerning religious toleration without also applying these teachings to civil interests. If, on the one hand, “the commonwealth seems . . . to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests.” And “civil interest” is limited to “life, liberty, health, and indolency [*sic*] of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like,” then it is difficult to imagine one consistently obedient to commands to “turn the other [cheek] to him also,” “let him have your coat also,” and “go with him two [miles],” ever entering into any such society.<sup>118</sup> If, on the other hand, it is permissible for Christians to compromise the commands of Christ for the sake of constituting the commonwealth, then one might also question whether it might be permissible for the Christian to compromise the commands upon which Locke bases the command to tolerate, perhaps even for the same purpose of constituting the commonwealth. Locke himself makes just such a compromise when he fails to extend toleration in his minimum dogma to religious groups, atheists and Muslims explicitly and by implication “Catholics, . . . Antinomians, and Levelers.”<sup>119</sup>

Locke must also contend with the possibility of a government that has grown dependent upon the religious consensus of its citizens. In such a condition, deviation from the consensus undermines the grounds upon which the government is built. Heresy becomes equivalent to treason. Locke even takes note of the possibility of this situation when he examines the punishment of idolaters in the “Jewish commonwealth” in the

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<sup>118</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, 6: 9-10.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-48; Ellis Sandoz, *A Government of Laws*, (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1990; Columbia: Missouri, 2001), 80.

*Letter Concerning Toleration*. Locke finds that this commonwealth was “different from all others” by being “an absolute theocracy.” Since “God himself was the legislator,” apostasy from the worship of God in the form of idolatry constituted rebellion and treason.<sup>120</sup> Locke here either ignores the many other ancient regimes that believed that they had received their laws from some god or distinguishes the “Jewish commonwealth” with his audience’s belief that this commonwealth received in truth what the others received by deception.

The problem posed by such theocratic societies to Locke’s thought is raised by a closer examination of one of the tenets of Locke’s minimum dogma. This is the tenet formed by Locke’s finding that “that church can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate, which is constituted upon such a bottom, that all those who enter into it, do thereby, *ipso facto*, deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince.”<sup>121</sup> If Locke acknowledges that churches exist which deliver their members into “the protection and service of another prince,” then those churches also deliver their members to their own princes when those churches are located in these princes’ realms. If the realm is constituted by such a delivery, as in the Papal States for example, then one might wonder if dissension from that church might justly be considered treason and rebellion in the same manner that idolatry was considered under the Mosaic Law. That secular authority, rather than religious, was responsible for the punishing of heretics in Western Christianity is indicative of this view of heresy as a crime against the commonwealth rather than a crime against the Church.

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<sup>120</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, 6: 37.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

Beyond Locke's attempt to justify his teachings as Christian is, of course, the rationale behind his beliefs. Locke's denunciation of religious persecution is in large part based upon his teaching that such persecution is ineffectual in converting internal belief.

He writes in the *Letter Concerning Toleration*:

The care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force: but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. And such is the nature of the understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of any thing by outward force. Confiscation of estate, imprisonment, torments, nothing of that nature can have any such efficacy as to make men change the inward judgment that they have framed of things.<sup>122</sup>

Without disputing Locke's claim of the uselessness of outward force in bringing about conversion, one may still dispute in favor of the utility of such force for the care of souls. While such measures may not show heretics the error of their ways, these measures may certainly be effective in preventing the spread of such errors. Heretics might be silenced by execution, imprisonment, or the fear of either. A magistrate concerned for the souls of the commonwealth's citizenry could very easily exercise such force for this very reason rather than to bring conversion to the heretic.

For Locke's teaching of toleration to be successful, those concerned with the souls of their neighbors with access to outward force must believe that the means to the salvation of those souls will not be endangered by the spread of erroneous teaching in order to be persuaded to not use such force. Locke must therefore defend his teaching of religious toleration by demonstrating either that these errors are insufficient to endanger the souls of those that believe them or that the way to salvation of souls is of such simplicity and reasonableness that those who believe errors that endanger their souls may

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 11.

be easily convinced of their error. Locke's minimum religious dogma represents an attempt at such a demonstration.

### III. Locke's Religious Dogma

Locke, in his *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*, concludes that "... the belief of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, together with those concomitant articles of his resurrection, rule, and coming again to judge the world, [is] all the faith required, as necessary to justification."<sup>123</sup> This minimum dogma he terms the "law of faith." He concludes, "but any other proposition contained in the Scripture, which God has not thus made a necessary part of the law of faith, (without an actual assent to which, he will not allow any one to be a believer) a man may be ignorant of, without hazarding his salvation by a defect in his faith."<sup>124</sup> He further states:

This is a plain, intelligible proposition; and the all-merciful God seems herein to have consulted the poor of the world, and the bulk of mankind. These are articles that the labouring and illiterate man may comprehend. This is a religion suited to vulgar capacities; and the state of mankind in this world, destined to labour and travel [*sic*].<sup>125</sup>

Locke finds Christianity to be just the sort of religion that is necessary for the conditions of his teachings. The remainder of this section will critique the means by which Locke arrives at this conclusion.

First, as a matter of hermeneutical method, Locke's relies exclusively upon the Gospels and the Book of Acts in the New Testament for this conclusion. Locke's reasoning for this is as follows:

The epistles therefore, being all written to those who were already believers and Christians, the occasion and end of writing them could not be to instruct them in that which was necessary to make them Christians. This, it is plain, they knew

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<sup>123</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, 7: 151.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

and believed already; or else they could not have been Christians and believers. And they were writ upon particular occasions; and without those occasions had not been writ; and so cannot be thought necessary to salvation: though they resolving doubts, and reforming mistakes, are of great advantage to our knowledge and practice. I do not deny, but the great doctrines of the Christian faith are dropt here and there, and scattered up and down in most of them. But it is not in the epistles we are to learn what are the fundamental articles of faith, where they are promiscuously and without distinction mixed with other truths, in discourses that were (though for edification, indeed, yet) only occasional. We shall find and discern those great and necessary points best, in the preaching of our Saviour and the apostles, to those who were yet strangers, and ignorant of the faith; to bring them in, and convert them to it. And what that was we have seen already out of the history of the evangelists and the Acts; where they are plainly laid down, so that nobody can mistake them.<sup>126</sup>

Locke therefore finds that no knowledge gained in the epistles of the New Testament can have any bearing upon the salvation of souls, only for the edification of these souls once they were saved. For the purposes of Locke's teaching of religious toleration this renders disputes over doctrines contained in the epistles benign to one who might use outward power to root out dangers to the souls of the citizens of the commonwealth. Since Locke's reasoning on this matter seems to have such great consequences for his other teaching, this reasoning deserves close scrutiny.

Locke makes assumptions about the nature of both the Gospels and the epistles in the New Testament. Locke assumes that the Gospels and the Book of Acts were not occasional or written to those already believing in Christianity as he claims the epistles were, and he further assumes that the occasional nature of the epistles prevents them from making any clarifications of what is necessary to the salvation of souls crucial to that salvation. Neither assumption may be completely justified.

Neither the Gospels nor the Book of Acts give any indication that they were composed for an unbelieving audience. The Gospel of Luke, and the Book of Acts which

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 153-154.



indicates itself as a sequel to Luke's Gospel (Acts 1:1), actually indicates that it is actually written to someone already initiated into the teachings of Christianity, if not already a believer in it (Luke 1:1-4). None of the other Gospels give any indication of their audience so explicitly, but the evidence taken as whole seems to make it more probable that they were written for an initiated audience, except perhaps the Gospel of Mark. It would also be conjecture to believe that the Gospels were not written for particular occasions, as were the epistles. It is entirely reasonable that at least one of the Gospels may have been written to root out beliefs deemed heretical by putting into writing teachings and actions of Jesus that had not been previously written. The Gospel of John's variance from the three Synoptic Gospels probably arises from just such a purpose.<sup>127</sup> If these books are both occasional and written to a believing audience, then Locke's claim that all of the New Testament's teachings necessary to salvation may be neatly found in the preaching contained in these books cannot be trusted. Even if the "fundamental article of faith" was plainly laid out in the preaching in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, that does not rule out the possibility that clarification of these articles crucial to the salvation of souls, and therefore relevant to Locke's teaching on religious toleration, may have been made in the epistles.

Voegelin's treatment of the *Reasonableness of Christianity* in his *History of Political Ideas* may aid the understanding of Locke's rejection of the Epistles:

When Locke approaches Christianity he makes a tabula rasa of Western history. In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he had swept aside all

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<sup>127</sup> Scholars are generally in concord in ascribing this purpose to the Gospel of John, their disagreements are typically more concerned with the authorship of the work, the veracity of its contents, the identification of heresy targeted, or the meaning of the John's argument. Cf. Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), chap. 11.

earlier metaphysical efforts and started philosophizing from scratch. In the present study he makes a similar sweep of all Christian tradition, including the patres and scholastics, and starts on an analysis of the New Testament as if it were a book that had been published yesterday. The mind of the *Essay* is a blank paper ready to receive the impression of the Gospel. Such open-mindedness leads to an interesting discovery, which Sir Leslie Stephen has summarized nicely in the following passage: “Christ and his apostles, on admitting converts to the church, did not exact from them a profession of belief in the Athanasian Creed, the Thirty-nine Articles, or the Westminster Confession, but were satisfied with the acknowledgment that Christ was the Messiah.”<sup>128</sup> We might have guessed it; and Locke probably guessed it, too, before he indulged in his lengthy and painstaking analysis that rendered this meager result. He did not want to prove the obvious. His ponderous exposition of the trite gains its weight through the implication that the later development of Christianity is an illegitimate excrescence. Only under the assumption that his labors restore the true core of Christianity do they make sense.<sup>129</sup>

Though Voegelin does not take note of it, Locke begins wiping away “illegitimate excrescence” within the New Testament itself with his failure to recognize the doctrinal importance of the Epistles.

Locke’s conclusion that believing Jesus to have been the Messiah is all that is necessary for the salvation of souls itself begs for clarification. One might ask, “What is meant by ‘belief,’ who was Jesus, or what exactly must ‘Messiah’ be believed to mean to ensure salvation?” The Epistles offer clarifications of each of these issues, as particular occasions demand clarification, sometimes going so far as to find those on the wrong side of a clarification to be unbelievers. Locke denies the need for such clarification for the salvation of souls, finding either that the “fundamental articles of faith” are either simple beyond need of clarification or possible incorrect interpretation of these articles cannot be so erroneous as to endanger the soul.

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<sup>128</sup> In a footnote here this quotation is attributed to “Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, I:80.”

<sup>129</sup> Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 6: 173.

Such a denial is advantageous to Locke's teaching of religious toleration. If clarification of Christian teachings were necessary even among those taught by Christ and his apostles to ensure the salvation of souls, then such a need would certainly be needed in the present day. If such a clarification is so necessary, then those in power may see those who believe other than what was clarified as dangerous to weak spirited subjects, thus making toleration a reckless policy.

Christian theology has been filled with a number of mysteries, doctrines that admit that their subjects are above all but minimal human comprehension. Examples of such mysteries from a selection of Christian traditions include beliefs in the Triune nature of the Godhead, the Incarnation of Christ, Original Sin, the Transubstantiation of the Eucharist, the Embodiment of Christ in the Church, and the Predestination of the Elect. While Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* may not explicitly deny the truth of *all* of these mysteries, he denies finding evidence of *many* of them and does not find belief in *any* of them to be necessary for the salvation of souls.

For an example of Locke's assault upon mystery one may consider his treatment of Original Sin. Locke finds that Adam's Fall in the Garden of Eden does not carry with it condemnation of his progeny, as held in the doctrine of Original Sin, but merely removes the beneficence of eternal life from mankind meaning "that all men will die."<sup>130</sup> Locke forges this conclusion with a literalism of hermeneutic that could shame all but the most rabid of fundamentalists. His entire interpretation of the relevant passages ignores the experience of being fallen that finds expression in the story of Adam. Locke is aided in this task with the "wiping away" of the Christian tradition discussed above. Such an

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<sup>130</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, 7: 8-9.

interpretation would have been impossible with the preservation of the Epistle to the Romans, not to mention the work of the patres or the scholastics.

More notable than Locke's reduction of the mystery of Original Sin is his treatment of the Incarnation of Christ. The difficulties of this mystery are the seed behind many of the greatest controversies in the history of Christianity. One might do well to recall the divide on this issue between Arians and Catholics that gave occasion to the Nicene Council. Prior to the Reformation, nearly all those termed heretics by the Catholic Church diverged from Catholic teaching on this subject. Locke, on the contrary, finds that correct teaching upon this issue is unimportant to the salvation of souls. The only Christological teaching necessary for salvation is that Jesus was the Messiah; it is entirely superfluous to salvation, according to Locke, whether one believes Christ to mean man, God, or a mix of the two. Locke finds that application of the phrase "Son of God" to Jesus means nothing more than that Jesus was the Messiah, so insistence upon belief that Jesus be the Son of God, such as in John 3:36's "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not believe in the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him," (UNASB) carry no further requirement of a potentially complex belief in the divinity of Jesus.<sup>131</sup> It is this teaching above all others that led early critics of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* to charge its author with the heresy of Socinianism.<sup>132</sup> Examination of this charge against *The Reasonableness* aids in the exploration of Locke's minimum religious dogma.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>132</sup> Each of the two vindications Locke wrote in defense of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was dedicated to refuting the charge of Socinianism levied by his opponent John Edwards; Ibid., 161-162, 191; cf. Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., "Socinianism,

Socinianism, also known as Racovianism, takes its name from its Italian founder Faustus Socinus. McLachlan in his *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* explains this belief system:

Two leading characteristics are at once apparent and place Socinianism in its proper perspective. These are its scrupulous and vigorous biblicism and its acknowledgement of the rights of reason in religion.<sup>133</sup>

McLachlan continues:

The Bible, for Socinus, was inspired, its authors being under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. To have any weight or substance a doctrine must be scripturally attested and rest upon the revelation given in Scripture. There was therefore no question of natural religion. Yet –and this is what is revolutionary in the thought of Socinus –in order to perceive the truths of revelation a man had of necessity to seek the guidance of reason, without which revelation was not self-evidencing. The Italian reformer was ready to confess that the biblical revelation might contain much that was supra-rational, but according to his exegesis nothing irrational. Right reason and divine truth must, of necessity agree.<sup>134</sup>

This position is found by McLachlan to lead to “some curious results.” Socinian writers were often driven to “forced explanations of scripture,” such as the rationalization of miracles “in a way that would to-day be considered either superfluous or inadmissible.”<sup>135</sup>

McLachlan now explains the most controversial findings of Socinus:

Judged by the test of reference to Scripture, the Trinitarian scheme (as generally understood) put itself out of court. He could find no genuine biblical text to support it. At the bar of reason, too, it utterly failed to convince: three persons in one substance were an impossibility of thought. The doctrine seemed, in fact, a metaphysical labyrinth, out of which it was impossible to find one’s way. Moreover, to make salvation depend on so abstruse a teaching, which had no practical significance for the Christian life, was absurd. Its place was therefore

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Justification by Faith, and The Sources of John Locke's The Reasonableness of Christianity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45, no. 1 (1984): 49-66.

<sup>133</sup> H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 11.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; cf. Voegelin’s treatment of Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding* in Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 6: 171-172.

<sup>135</sup> McLachlan, 12.

taken by the doctrine of the Unipersonality of God and its natural corollary the humanity of Christ.<sup>136</sup>

This will be treated as the crucial point of distinction of Socinianism for the purposes of this study since this is the provision of Socinian doctrine above all others by which Socinianism became a reviled name in Locke's day.

The charge of Socinianism levied against Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* is not without merit. Locke's manner of argument, his rejection of mystery, and, most of all, his denial of the necessity of belief in the Incarnation or the Trinity all seem representative of Socinian belief. Further, when one considers that the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, similar to Socinian teachings on toleration, was not known by Locke's first accusers to have also been written by the same author, almost proves the case for Locke's Socinianism.<sup>137</sup>

In *A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity* Locke denies the charge of Socinianism. He even feigns wonder at such a charge that may be overturned by such a denial.<sup>138</sup> "Feigns" is the appropriate word, for Locke makes the wrong simple denial. Denial of the charge of Socinianism does not repudiate its belief. Denial of its chief tenets would. Locke never makes such a denial. Throughout the *Reasonableness of Christianity* and its two vindications Locke scrupulously avoids ever directly stating his own position on the Trinity or the Incarnation. However, this in itself cannot be taken as conclusive evidence of Socinianism and may even be taken as evidence against the charge, though not in a way particularly flattering to Locke.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>137</sup> For Socinian toleration, Ibid., 9, 302-303; *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was published anonymously.

<sup>138</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, 7: 163.

While the Socinians deny the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, Locke denies their importance. Locke in this way went farther than the Socinians would go. Locke opponents, had they taken note of this, would have realized that this does not make Locke a Socinian, but it may make him worse. Edwards argued that the author of the *Reasonableness* was a Socinian and, therefore, an atheist.<sup>139</sup> Edwards may have found an easier argument by charging that Locke's minimum dogma constituted atheism directly. This not to say that Locke did not believe in God, but rather that he propagated beliefs more favorable to the fostering of atheism than the Socinians did.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Locke, in effect, finds belief in anything above human comprehension to be unnecessary to the salvation of souls, removing or rendering irrelevant all mystery in Christianity. This removal of mystery might even be what Locke means with the word "Reasonableness" in the title of this work. "Reasonableness" may equate with "simplicity," "comprehensibility," or even "inability to cause a fuss," as Locke equates "Son of God" with "Messiah." If one joins Locke in finding belief in these mysteries unnecessary for salvation, then one would be hard pressed to find any teaching so pernicious to the salvation of souls as to merit the persecution of its spread.

Locke seems to have designed his minimum religious dogma to render the dominant religion of his society safe for the free pursuit of civil interests. It is this convenient fit that led to earlier observations in this study that neither of Locke's minimum dogmas serve the purpose of protecting truth. The minimum religious dogma joins the civil dogma in the pursuit of civil interests. At this point, one must admit that

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 162.

minimum dogma has now been finally, completely divorced from its engendering experience, the leap in being.

This is the fundamental weakness of Locke's minimum dogma. A renewed experience of the leap in being can shake the foundations of Locke's nexus of minimum dogmas. Locke's minimum religious dogma simply does not go far enough in isolating representations that will be immediately sensed to be unseemly, or false in the Platonic sense, by one who has experienced this leap. This minimum dogma itself may even be found to be unseemly. As Locke does nothing to prevent the reawakening of the experience of the leap in being, this experience poses a continual threat to his end of pursuing peace solely for the sake of peace. This oversight by Locke is excusable, however, since sufficient conditions to prevent a leap in being may only be possible in an Orwellian nightmare regime.

Locke's design for peace in the minimum civil dogma is not without merit. As the first chapter of this study concluded with Voegelin, "an attack on the unseemly symbolizations of order may destroy order itself with the faith in its analogies, that it is better to see the truth obscurely than not at all, that imperfect attunement to the order of being is preferable to disorder."<sup>140</sup> This applies to Locke's unseemly minimum dogma just as it did to the cosmological analogues of the past. Room may ultimately be found for the representation of a leap in being under the protection of the order offered by Locke's minimum dogma. Though imperfect, and unseemly, in its representation of the deeper questions of life, the shelter offered by Locke's minimum dogma does allow the

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<sup>140</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, 1: 11.



conditions for these questions to be asked. Locke may have accomplished by accident the feat greater spirits before him, like Spinoza, only attempted.

## CONCLUSION

This study followed the development of minimum dogma from its inception in the experience of the leap in being to the abandonment of the leap in being as the orienting force in the minimum dogma advocated by Locke. The course of this development will be briefly reviewed here. A treatment of the final problem raised by this study, the inadequacy of Locke's minimum religious dogma as a support for his minimum civil dogma, will complete this study after this review.

The first chapter of this study found that minimum dogmas, the concern of this study, emerged initially as critiques of the milieu of analogical symbolization utilized by humanity to comprehend the fundamental experiences that man has of the world. These critiques, following a lengthy process of differentiation of the earlier symbolization, come as a result of the experience of the inadequacy of all analogies in the description of the reality experienced beyond reality as it is observed. The first of these critiques found by Eric Voegelin in his research of the matter, the critique of the Hellenic poets by Xenophanes, rejected such analogues as unseemly. The proper representation of this reality beyond reality becomes a pressing concern that culminates with Plato's rejection of the poets in the minimum dogma of *The Republic*.<sup>141</sup> This pressing concern is alleviated in the salutary minimum dogma of *The Laws*, a dogma that contradicts the findings of philosophy, since an imperfect order is found to be preferable to the destruction of the material basis of all order in the pursuit of a perfect order.

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<sup>141</sup> The exile of the poets from the best polis in Book Ten of *The Republic* was not considered in this study, though a study of this event in the dialogue may be fruitful to a better understanding of this study's subject.

The second chapter examines two minimum dogmas that represent an institutional shift from the minimum dogmas in the works of Plato and Xenophanes' seemliness. The minimum dogmas found in the work of St. Thomas More and Benedict de Spinoza, rather than functioning as rejections of inadequate representation of the divine as had Xenophanes, Plato, and the theological tradition following their work, served to increase the representations deemed acceptable. This shift represented a marriage of minimum dogma and religious toleration in the interest of securing the survival of material basis of all order, moving beyond the minimum dogma of *The Laws* but, arguably, moving by the same motivation.

The third and final chapter of this study found that while Locke continued the marriage of minimum dogma and toleration made by More and Spinoza, he also represented a break from their tradition. The minimum dogmas of More and Spinoza both had the end of securing the material basis of order for the sake of that order.<sup>142</sup> Locke in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* advocated a minimum dogma that acted solely to secure this base without concern for the proper representation of the divine. Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* represented in its entirety a recommendation of a second voluntary, religiously motivated (purportedly) minimum dogma. This dogma was found to function as an institutional support for Locke's first minimum dogma and to have very little to recommend of itself beyond that function.

It is also this dogma that poses the final problem found by this study. This study found a variety of tasks that the religious minimum dogma of Locke seems intended to fill. Chief of these tasks is the formulation of a convincing argument that the truth has no

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<sup>142</sup> More's minimum dogma was found to have similarities to Locke's but was found to have a further end by an esoteric reading of the *Utopia*.

need of coercion. Locke's minimum dogma demonstrates the requirements of salvation as both satisfied by a great number of the competing belief systems in his contemporary society and simple beyond the need for coercive aid. This study found that Locke's religious minimum dogma survives neither close scrutiny nor profound religious experience. The failure of this component of Locke's thought creates a theoretical vacuum that must be filled if the remainder of his program is to survive the stress of existence.

The filling of this theoretical vacuum is a pressing issue as Locke's teaching on toleration and the standard by which he constructed his minimum civil dogma have both been incorporated into the constitutions and jurisprudence of many of the nation-states of Western Civilization. These teachings also form a key, if not *the* key component, of the Western liberal values formulated as fundamental human rights that must necessarily be protected by all legitimate governments. Since this study shares the belief that it found expressed in Plato's formulation of the minimum dogma found in *The Laws*, that is the belief that imperfect order is preferable to the destruction of the material basis upon which order is founded in the pursuit of perfect order (or even improved order), it is now necessary to attempt to find an appropriate filling for the previously mentioned theoretical vacuum.

One candidate for such a filling may be found in Ellis Sandoz's treatment of Locke and the American founding in *A Government of Laws*. Sandoz finds that the Locke the American Founders had in view when they drew so heavily upon his thought in support of their own is not the Locke revealed by critical examination. The American Founders understood Locke as firmly planted in the Christian Whig tradition and as an

opponent of Hobbes as much as of Filmer. Locke's natural right was viewed as an extension of the natural law of the Thomistic tradition and his views on property were viewed as developing from reverence of the Ancient Constitution.<sup>143</sup> Sandoz further finds that the Biblical and Classical studies of the founders were so deep that they adequately covered the faults of Locke. Locke's "Life, Liberty, and Property," are seamlessly translated, for example, into the far more philosophically grounded "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness," by Jefferson in the Declaration. A Locke incompatible with Christian cosmology "was simply unthinkable to the American founders."<sup>144</sup>

Sandoz finds that the American Founders intuitively corrected the entire Lockean regime, not only his teachings on toleration. The Classical and Biblical background of the American Founders also might be found filling the vacuum left by the failure of Locke's minimum religious dogma. So secure were the Founders in this background that the true representation of the divine was not perceived as endangered by incorporating toleration into the Bill Of Rights amended to the American Constitution nor the toleration found in many of the state constitutions. Rather than basing toleration in the minimal truth found by Locke, it was based in the magnanimity of the truth found through the course of the Western tradition.

Such a basis is subject to a few criticisms, however. First, the consensus upon which this basis of magnanimity is founded, artificially created through immigration of groups prepossessing it to a land empty of serious threats to it, has been broken and is unlikely to resurface without resorting to means that might destroy the basis of order that

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<sup>143</sup> Sandoz, *A Government of Laws*, 191.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

this study hopes to safeguard. Second, this magnanimity was not so magnanimous to guarantee toleration at the State level of government, preserving a sphere for enforcing the adequacy of representation of divinity. Finally, this basis alone did not fill the theoretical vacuum. Prevalent also was a “Yankee Trader” mentality that shared Locke’s apathy towards the true representation of the divine. This mentality formed at least part of the compromise that mandated toleration at the Federal level of government in the Constitution while allowing states discretion to enforce religious dogma within their police power at the local level. It is also this mentality that probably most prompts the reaction of religious movements, such as Fundamentalisms of different types or even perhaps mass movements like Marxism, against toleration.

Grounding toleration upon the magnanimity of an experience of such profundity that it does not need coercion might remain the right approach to the present problem if one guards against the preceding criticisms. Such magnanimity must not be dependent upon consensus as that of the Founders, since no consensus of this sort is available. Likewise, magnanimity must be of a degree that it can cope with the rejection of the Constitutional compromise of Federal toleration only and accept toleration as it is now guaranteed at every level of government. This means that the truth experienced must be more magnanimous than that found in the Founders in one is find experiential support for toleration as it is now practiced.

An experience of this profundity may not be easily had. It requires a maturity of experience similar to that this study found in Plato’s minimum dogma in *The Laws*. Plato is here so confident of the sufficiency of the truth of existence experienced by the philosopher that he is willing to remove the philosopher from the protection of society,

even mandating the imprisonment and occasional execution of philosophers who cannot keep their peace. Plato is able to do this because the experience of the philosopher in founding the city is sufficiently adequate that the experience need not be enforced upon others at the risk of societal cohesion. The diffusion of the experience of the leap in being in modern society complicates the problem, since rather than Plato's necessity of finding adequately profound representation for the experience of isolated philosophers, adequate representation must be found communally for the many manifestations in which the leap in being may now be found. This task, as well as the incorporation of its findings into a theory of politics, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study.

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